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A Two Site Study of the Reconstruction of the Buddhist Monastery in Cambodia Post-Khmer Rouge

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Abstract

From the fall of Phnom Penh, to the hyper-Marxist Khmer Rouge, to the decades-long civil war and reconstruction of the country following Vietnam's invasion in 1979, Cambodia has seen a cultural upheaval that brought with it the destruction of institutions and ways of life that have been slow to recover. This two site study examines the reconstruction of one those institutions, the Buddhist monastery, in Prey Thom commune in the southwestern province of Kampot. The loss of traditions, texts, and clergy has meant that the centre of village life -- the local temple -- has had to regain many of those aspects that defined it throughout the centuries. Two of these, the power the monastery commanded in the eyes of locals and the monastic identity which defined how that power was expressed, have historically been vital to the monastery's existence and allowed for temples to be the epicentre of villages, defining individuals' lives and the agrarian economy they depended on. The monastery's reconstruction has also meant that the reliance on local folk and Hindu beliefs continued, and in some instances, grew in prominence in the absence of a viable and competent cadre of Buddhist monks. As the monastery continues to regain its former stature, how this affects merit-making traditions and the local economies which rely on them in many ways reflects the importance of local temples from village to village. While monastic schooling has proved to be important in recreating a knowledgeable cadre, how this affects local attitudes regarding the status of monks is further shaped by those outside of the monastery who either purposely or unknowingly determine local perceptions of it. The future of the monastery will depend on how it can maintain a degree of separation from these larger entities while continuing to serve in the time-honoured roles that sustain villages and the traditions they have historically relied upon.

1. Introduction

Cambodian society has witnessed a drastic change over the past several decades, the likes of which has not been experienced by other countries around the world. From the initial overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in 1970, to the fall of Phnom Penh to Khmer Rouge forces in 1975, to the invasion and subsequent occupation by the Vietnamese throughout the 1980s and the civil war that followed, the once peaceful country coping with the war that surrounded it was transformed while much of the world turned its back on the region. What was left in the wake of the Khmer Rouge was a loss of tradition and traditional institutions that had for centuries played an integral part of Khmer life.

One of the most important of these institutions was the Buddhist monastery which had played numerous roles within villages as it had for centuries. Its destruction and later reconstruction under the direction of subsequent secular governments battling an insurgency is in many ways indicative of its real and perceived influence on an overwhelmingly rural, agrarian society. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how the Cambodian monastery and monastic community have changed since the war and to assess whether the traditional roles of temples as social, educational, political, and economic centres have been re-established to a similar state they were in before their destruction from 1975-1979. Specifically, it will examine:

- The power and identity the local monastery is perceived to hold within villages post-Khmer Rouge and the political-spiritual authority it has regained in the wake of its destruction.

- The relationship between local temples and the wider state and how this in turn affects the relationship between a village and its local temple.
- The re-establishment of the traditional roles of the local *wat* and its place as a communal point of reference.
- The sacred and profane in Buddhism's expression pre- and post-war.
- The economy of merit and the distribution of merit, material, and financial resources within the Great and Little traditions.
- The reliance on Hindu and folk beliefs in the wake of the Buddhism's destruction.
- The role of institutional '*devarãja-ism*'.
- The future of the Cambodian Buddhist monastery.

Probing the changing contexts within which religious beliefs operate and their influence on one another and an overwhelmingly rural populace historically dependent upon a strong monastic system as a conduit for engaging the above institutions is crucial in this endeavour. Therefore, both historical and ethnographic sources have been used for this study. This is partly due to the change in the monastery post-Khmer Rouge and also because of the lack of data available during that regime's time in power from 1975-79 and the subsequent Vietnamese occupation and insurgency which lasted until the late 1990s. Thus, there is a gap in the literature surrounding this period that has only partially been filled through the work by researchers and international aid, governmental, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

While Cambodian scholars and research institutes such as the Documentation

Center of Cambodia have done much to expand the literature in light of the long delay of UN tribunals and absence of adequate accounts of the holocaust within the Cambodian public education system, much works needs to be done. With this in mind, I address issues central to the monastery's reconstruction and its role as the traditional centre of Cambodian life and vehicle for religious, social, educational, political and economic interaction. Although this is not an attempt to provide a representative account of every Cambodian monastery or 'typical' religious outlook on the part of Khmers, it is an attempt to address the above theoretical questions and their importance for civil society in a post-war environment.

Prior to the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975 and the establishment of Democratic Kampuchea (also known as the DK regime), there were ethnographic accounts of Cambodian life but more often research tended to focus on Angkor Wat and the great Khmer kingdoms of the past. My research not only expands the ethnographic literature but also addresses wider issues of reconstruction and the place of traditional institutions in that effort. This first chapter will detail my focus of research and give a broad overview of the historical development of Khmer cosmology and Theravada Buddhism within Southeast Asia and its doctrinal development over time.

Research Sites and Focus of Study:

Selection of Research Sites

I arrived in Cambodia towards the end of November 2003, with a few contacts already established through research and by word of mouth from other anthropologists. I spent the year prior to my fieldwork studying the Khmer language but concentrated on speaking as opposed to learning the Khmer script due to time constraints. Khmer, as opposed to languages in neighbouring countries, is not tonal and I found it to be less difficult than I initially anticipated. Many of my informants could converse in English but as a general rule I spoke both languages, however, this varied according to context. Many older Khmers could not speak English but they could speak French, and although I do not speak French it was generally the language they would offer first before speaking Khmer. The opposite was true for younger individuals.

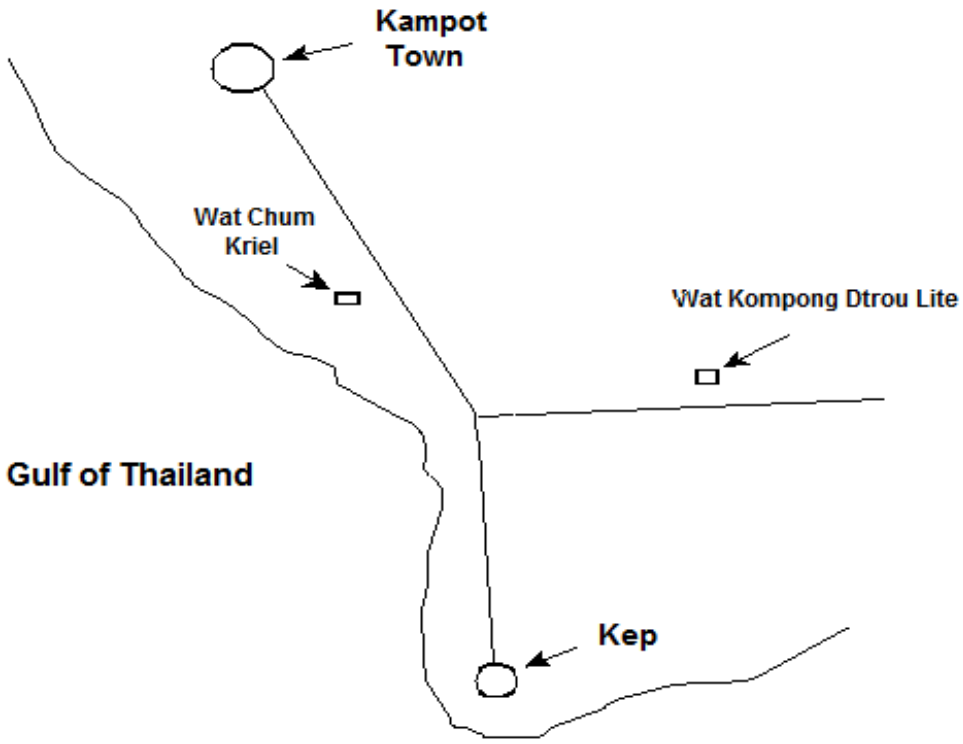
My first contact was with a former monk named Cheatlom who had worked with a colleague in the past as an interpreter. I explained my interest in the role of monks in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia and he was keen to help as he felt the subject was important for Cambodians given the destruction of the religion during the Democratic Kampuchea regime of the Khmer Rouge. He lived through the regime as a child and recalled a time of hunger, violence, and endless sessions of propaganda (which were termed ‘school’ by Khmer Rouge officials).

We agreed on initial trips to the ancient city of Udong, north of Phnom Penh and the provinces of Kompong Thom and Kompong Chhnang, north and northwest of the capital.

Cheatlom had served as a monk in those areas and still had friends there serving in *wats*. Later trips would include visiting the provinces of Battambang, Svay Rieng and Kampot in the northwest, south, and southwest of the country. Although these initial trips proved successful in gaining a greater insight into aspects of Khmer culture I was previously unaware of, I thought that focusing on a region that experienced a great deal of Khmer Rouge activity might prove better in understanding how the monastery had been re-established. With that in mind, I decided to focus on the coastal province of Kampot in the far southwest of the country bordering Vietnam. The province had seen some of the worst fighting and was, along with Battambang province in the northwest, one of the last holdouts of the Khmer Rouge. One area in particular was the small seaside village of Kep which was targeted heavily since it was a particular favourite of

wealthy Khmers. I chose this region given the lack of research in the area as well as the fact that fighting continued there as late as 1999. Further, the region is poised to grow in terms of tourism and industry and these two factors will likely affect local *wats* in terms of exposure to outside influence and the attitudes of villagers (particularly that of young men) as to their importance in the face of modernisation.

After meeting with the monastic community at several local *wats* and discussing the possibility of conducting research in the area, I decided to focus on two temples relatively close to one another -- Wat Chum Kriel and Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite. These *wats* were chosen due to their proximity to one another thus making it easier to travel back and forth between them. They also were in many ways mirror opposites of one another. Wat Chum Kriel was the largest *wat* in the province, housed over 200 monks, was home to its only Buddhist high school, and was considered a 'rich' *wat* by many as it enjoyed political and other elite patronage. It was also a 'transitional' *wat* in many respects as the monks, by and large, were there solely to attend high school. Often monks would refer to Wat Chum Kriel as separate from their 'home' *wat* which most returned to for Buddhist holidays or time off from school. In many respects it was not your average Buddhist temple as it lacked the comings and goings seen in most rural and smaller *wats*. However, due to its proximity to a more populated urban centre (Kampot town) it was, therefore, not necessarily the only site for social activity as *wats* commonly are in more sparsely inhabited areas.



In contrast, Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite was more of a classical local, rural Buddhist temple. It was small in size, had between six to nine monks at any one time, and served the local rice farmers in the surrounding villages. Further, it was in an area that had experienced prolonged fighting and was caught in the middle between local villages and mountains from where the Khmer Rouge launched attacks on the surrounding countryside (three Western backpackers were kidnapped and later executed in the mountains in 1994). The *wat* had been looted during the Khmer Rouge's time in power and, as with most *wats*, was ultimately destroyed and used as a pen for livestock.

Locals would recall that throughout the 1990s monks would have to flee when the Khmer Rouge would come down from the mountains and loot the *wat* and commune

and occasionally target them for execution. The area experienced a large loss of human life under the Communist regime but the abbot of Kompong Dtrou Lite helped keep the memory of the atrocities alive by collecting the bones of Khmer Rouge victims in the area and placing them in a shrine at the east end of the temple's grounds. This is not unique to Kompong Dtrou Lite as numerous *wats* throughout the country have these types of unofficial shrines. Wat Chum Kriel had a similar shrine but it was designated as an official site by the government.

Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite was viewed as an important *wat* in the area and had been supported over the years by many Khmers living abroad. It, along with Wat Chum Kriel, was partially rebuilt with money donated by Prime Minister Hun Sen who was himself was a former Khmer Rouge Southeastern Zone commander before fleeing to Vietnam in 1977. He was later made prime minister under the Vietnamese installed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government following the collapse of the Democratic Kampuchea regime of the Khmer Rouge and has continued to hold power for the past 20 years. Recently, the current government has been pushing small *wats* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite to destroy their shrines. Although this study does not address the likelihood and ramifications of UN backed Khmer Rouge trials, this is an interesting development given their current prosecution.

Initial Focus of Research

I began my research focusing on traditional and new technologies regarding irrigation and the influence of local *wats* in either maintaining them through ritual or through more practical applications such as being sites for wells and/or dykes. As this had ancient and more recent historical significance I wanted to understand to what extent, if any, this role had been restored post-Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge themselves exploited the notion of a 'hydraulic civilisation' (Wittfogel 1957) cultivated from aggrandised histories of past Khmer civilisations, most notably the dramatic building projects undertaken culminating in the Angkor Wat complex in northern Siem Reap province.

The continuity of this hydraulic movement was centred on local Buddhist *wats*, given that these served as focal points for villages as centres for religious and social affairs. Monks came to hold religious roles but also economic and political ones. Planting and harvesting ceremonies determined at what point in time both exercises could commence, which in turn provided food for locals as well as tribute for the royal court. Monks came to hold positions of high status within villages as spiritual leaders who were also consulted on local village politics and, over time, national affairs.

It was this 'power' that was recognised by local and national leaders and which ultimately led the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot to realise that the monasteries had to be destroyed in order to secure their complete dominance over the Khmer people. During the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-79 this was exactly what happened. *Wats* were looted, destroyed, and used as storage buildings for supplies or livestock as well as execution sites. Monks were either forced to defrock or killed outright. Khmers

(particularly the young) were taught that monks were, among others, the enemy and not to be trusted. Even after the Vietnamese invasion in 1979 and the ongoing civil war that continued through the late 1990s, *wats* were continuously looted and monks were targets for violence.

My initial over-arching enquiry was, of course, how has the monastery been restored and to what degree? Has it changed or morphed into something unrecognisable from the pre-1975 state of affairs given that the monastery's reintegration was slow in coming and only fully re-established in the 1990s? Further, how has the relationship between the monastery and government been reconciled and to what degree has it been able to reclaim or redevelop its influence within villages post-1979? The massive operation undertaken by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in the early 1990s leading to the UN backed elections in 1993 and the flood of NGOs into the country would surely bring changes to the countryside (where 80-85% of the population resides). However, how these changes affected an institution integral to rural village life was important to study given the drastic social upheaval that occurred. This in turn would require an examination of the monastery's 'power' and 'identity' relative to its former status in a post-war society that saw its elimination in a matter of years.

What I found after initial interviews with older monks, many of whom were monks before the Khmer Rouge and forced to disrobe, was that they felt their role and the importance of Buddhist ceremonies in regard to farming were overshadowed by new technologies -- motorised farm equipment and fertilisers, for example. They also felt that these same technologies were to blame for some of the problems now facing

Cambodia such as droughts and poor harvests due to over-exploitation of the soil. Not surprisingly, there was also a generational issue. The younger generation of monks did not always see their role as weakened but did recognise that other competing beliefs such as the various Hindu cults and the belief in local spirits not only had historic importance, but often held a larger role in the countryside in relation to their own. This younger generation of monks were in the monastery for a variety of reasons: spiritual, economic, and for many, to receive an education.

I began to become increasingly interested in the issue of local folk beliefs and their relative importance in people's lives as compared to that of Buddhism or Hindu beliefs. Further, I was also interested in how these have been incorporated into the Great traditions previously explored in South and Southeast Asia by Tambiah in Thailand (1970), Obeyesekere in Sri Lanka (1966), and others. One example of this connection with my initial interests can be seen in a dam recently built within the area. The dam was constructed near Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite originally by the Khmer Rouge and rebuilt in 2005 by the government with assistance from the World Bank. A small structure was built for a powerful *neak ta*, or local spirit, within the dam and it was said to control the water as well as guard the general area. The collapse of one section the previous year and the flooding of local farms that ensued was blamed on water within the dam touching the spirit's house. The local government official in charge of controlling the run-off was also in charge of arranging *neak ta* ceremonies overseen -- but not conducted -- by the abbot of Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite.

Although Buddhism is the official religion of Cambodia, local folk beliefs have traditionally filled roles for which Buddhism is perceived as ineffective. One particular

role is in regard to one's health and regular offerings are given to *neak ta* shrines in order to alleviate various afflictions. It is also important to note that every *wat* will have its own *neak ta* and shrine normally in the northeast corner (Chouléan 1988) and that these *neak ta* are generally perceived as more powerful than others in the area. While monks technically cannot conduct *neak ta* ceremonies (and there was confusion over this issue on the part of some monks), they do hold a significant place alongside Buddhism. Laymen and monks alike readily accepted this. As monks would put it, "It's Cambodia's first religion." Although monks from Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel expressed knowledge of *neak ta* and their importance, they were also realistic about their own position within society; "Buddhism in the city, *neak ta* in the countryside" was a popular refrain I heard over the year from many monks.

I later began to examine the commitment and quality of Buddhism found in the monkhood among younger monks. Reports of young monks getting drunk, having girlfriends, getting into fights, and so on are not uncommon. What I did notice over and over again was a perception that their time in the monastery was of limited duration. Most did not plan on being in the monastery for long and many used their position within the *wat* as a means of escapism -- either from working as rice farmers or as a means to get a free education and thus, a 'good job'.

Although education is technically free in Cambodia, teachers still demand money from their students, which keeps many (particularly females) out of the classroom. Education is free for monks and although I knew some very conscientious and dedicated monks I also knew many who realised they had a privileged position and were using their time in the *wat* to attend school as well as a means for secular social advancement.

This, however, did not go unnoticed by many villagers who refused to patronise some of the larger *wats* such as Wat Chum Kriel specifically because it was the recipient of donations from the government and Khmer expatriates and, therefore, seen as a 'rich' *wat*. Thus, there was a difference in local perceptions which split along various lines, generational, gender, and economic status being the most notable.

As my time in Cambodia progressed I found myself looking away from those technological aspects I initially thought to be important, and more towards the position of monks in a society that has swayed so violently back and forth between competing ideologies and warring countries. While shortages of food still persists in certain parts of the kingdom and diseases such as HIV/AIDS affect a great number of people (particularly in the countryside), leaders of the Khmer Rouge still walk the streets freely. Only now, decades on are trials for ex-cadre members being conducted. While these long awaited UN tribunals are finally underway, only a handful of top-level cadre are being tried. Indeed, many within the government and military were high-ranking officials in the Khmer Rouge which further compounds the problem of reconciliation. The role of monks, being destroyed during 1975-1979, has slowly climbed back and is now competing with a fast changing environment as Cambodia has become truly open for the first time in decades.

Not surprisingly, many Cambodians and non-Cambodians have noted changes in Khmer society as it comes out of decades of unrest. While students still receive only cursory instruction about the Khmer Rouge and speaking openly about the government is dangerous, many in the monastery enjoy privileges that non-monks do not. Most notably, they are a good source of knowledge regarding the Khmer Rouge regime as

well as having a greater degree of ‘liberties’. I found that monks were more likely than the lay community to express contempt publicly for corruption within the government. Although demonstrations by Buddhist monks have brought violent clashes with the police and military in the past, they are still supported by many for this very reason. While the average citizen does not have the freedom to speak openly about those in power, they know that monks can (to an extent) and they are still valued by many for that role. Even though this study covers many topics including Hindu and folk beliefs, they will be under the wider umbrella of the change and continuity in the Buddhist monastery. More importantly, how must monks straddle a society that is still very traditional but also one that is changing at a very fast rate and may ultimately come to rely on the monastery to act as a broker in that transition?

Kampot Province

Kampot province lies in the far southwest of the country bordering Vietnam to the south and the gulf of Thailand to the west. The province was known for its pepper plantations by the French and was a main exporter of the product during and after colonisation with its provincial capital, Kampot, acting as the main port of the country prior to the dredging of the port of Kompong Som to the northwest. It was also a seat of early Communist activity even prior to independence. During the reign of Prince Sihanouk and his Sangkhum government, alleged Communists were brutally suppressed by the regime which often placed their heads outside the main market of Kampot town as a warning for would be participants.

As discussed below, the Communist insurgency that culminated in the disastrous

reign of the Khmer Rouge was active for years and did not appear overnight in a peaceful land surrounded by war as some authors of the region have contended. While the result of the Indochinese wars contributed to Cambodia's slow slide into ruin during 1975-1979, the common denominators of 'power' and 'identity' associated with Khmer rulers past and present have historically centred on a 'one man rule' style of governing. The two extremes of this phenomenon were the *devarãja*, or god-king, adopted from Indic traditions enjoyed by Khmer kings until the beginning of the twentieth century, and 'Brother Number One', Pol Pot, towards its latter half.

During the Democratic Kampuchea regime the province was, along with most of the rest of the country, turned into a vast concentration camp remembered by the official and unofficial memorials and killing fields scattered about the country. It was also the site of agricultural projects and irrigation works costing the lives of an untold number of Khmers who worked as slave labourers for the Khmer Rouge's hyper-Marxist state. The province, like many others, is now dominated by the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and continues to enjoy patronage by Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has donated money for the rebuilding of *wats* and schools throughout the province such as Wat Chum Kriel and Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite. Bordering Vietnam, the province is also home to many ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Cham, the Muslim minority of Cambodia and Vietnam and descendants of the ancient kingdom of Champa to the east.

Chum Kriel Commune and Chum Kriel Village

Chum Kriel commune lies approximately six kilometres outside of Kampot town and contains the villages of Trapeang Thum, Chum Kriel, Samraong, and Kampong Kandal. Local political offices are dominated by the CPP party which also patronises local *wats* such as Wat Chum Kriel. Lying outside of town, it has no access to piped water and relies on wells and local ponds. The commune contains 215ha of cultivated rice fields all of which is wet season rainfed land. As it lies closer to Kampot town, the commune has greater access than other villages to trade and employment outside of agriculture such as salt fields to its immediate south as well as schools (particularly private ones) and medical facilities.

The total number of families within the commune at the time of this study was 987: 2,499 females and 2,401 males. The number of families within Chum Kriel village where the *wat* is situated was 334 made up of 751 females and 722 males. There were 68 females and 54 males aged 0-5 years old; 149 females and 141 males aged 6-14 years (145 and 141 respectively were attending school); 169 females and 153 males aged 15-17 years; 278 females and 297 males aged 18-64 years; and 87 females and 77 males over 65 years old. There were 18 families with access to piped water, private wells or ring taps year round, 35 families with access to the public wells and water taps, and 281 families that relied on ponds, rainwater or rivers (Ministry of Planning, 2004). The number of males between 15-17 years is important for this study as this is the age range when most young men enter the monastery. Although there are monks who enter the monastery earlier as well as later, the majority of new entrants into the *sangha* (traditionally defined as the community of monks but now referring to a *wat's* entire

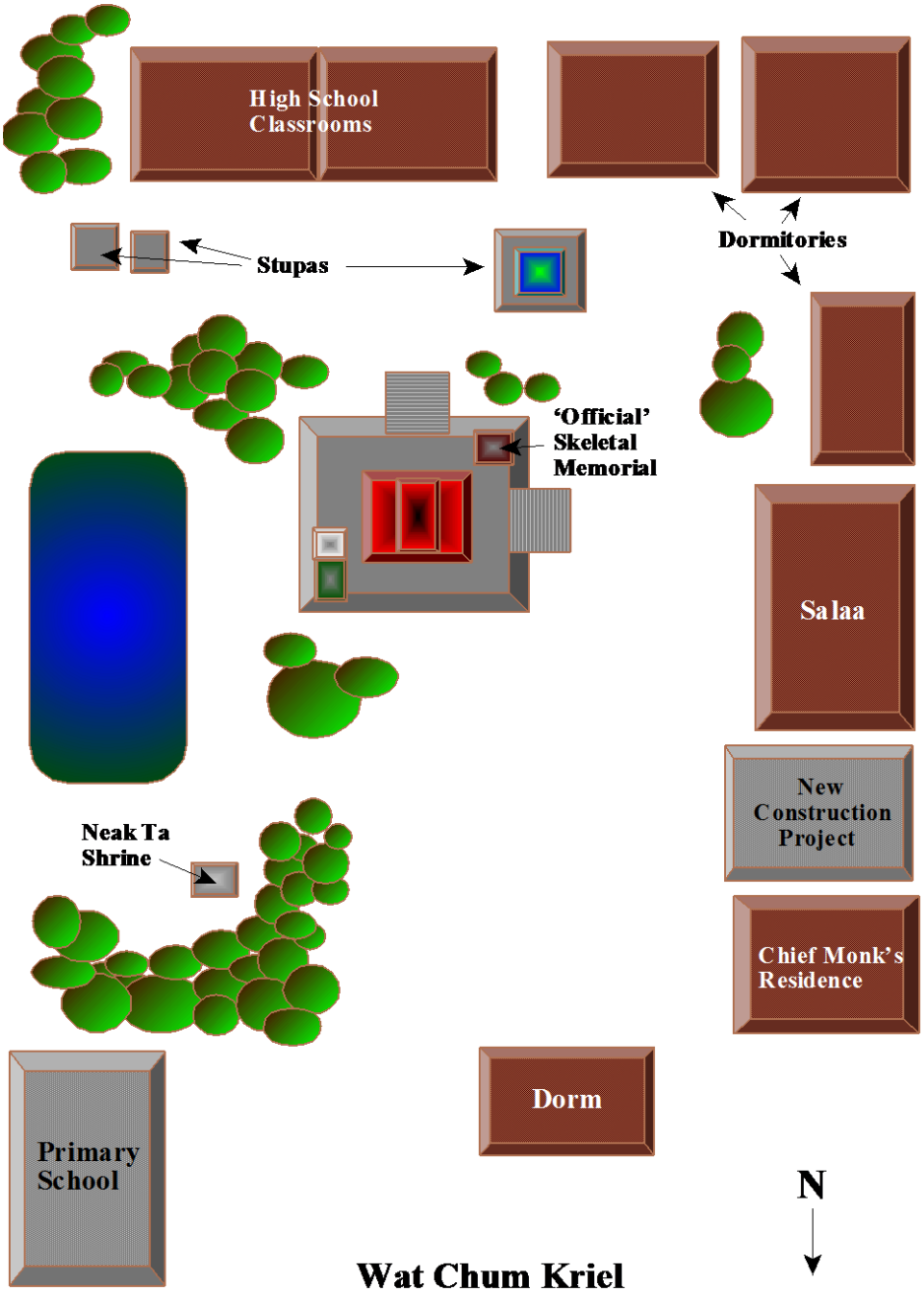
congregation) often fall within this range.

Aside from Buddhist *wats,* there was also a mosque with an accompanying school several kilometres to the south serving a small Cham fishing village. As noted, rice fields within the commune are of the wet variety, rainfed, and relatively small and unevenly sectioned off measuring 5x10m or larger (the provincial average of harvested rice is 1.6mt per hectare compared to 1-5mt/ha for the entire country, however, many households had much less [IFAD 2000:10]). Most villagers are rice farmers owning a small amount of land or work in the local salt fields, engage in trade, or non-traditional employment such as a *motodop* (ad hoc motorcycle taxi drivers). There are also a greater number of small trading stalls with the normal fare of cigarettes, bottled water, and other goods than further south towards Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite. Being closer to an urban centre meant a higher concentration of people which in turn affected the construction of homes -- most were built close to one another leaving less space for large rice fields between them.

Wat Chum Kriel

Wat Chum Kriel is within Chum Kriel commune. Aside from the commune's 'official' villages it also serves the villages of Dteuk Laik, Doch (which locals consider too small to be its own village and is said in reference to Dteuk Laik), Svai, Dah-Grah, and Cray-On. Wat Chum Kriel is the largest *wat* in Kampot province with around 200 monks living there at any given time. Not only is the *wat* home to the only Buddhist high school in the province, it is also the seat of the provincial head of the Cambodian Buddhist monastery. The resident monks differ from other monks in the province in that they are there primarily to attend the high school. After taking a competitive entrance exam against other potential student-monks they are selected to attend the school.

In this way, the *wat* is far different from your 'average' monastery. It is structurally large and enjoys patronage by local and national political figures. As such, it does not receive the same type of local patronage as Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite which lies in an overwhelmingly rural area. Being known as a 'rich' *wat* it was, therefore, somewhat separate from the commune in terms of personal connections. Throughout my stay, locals did not visit the *wat* regularly as did local villagers near Kompong Dtrou Lite nor did it receive the same amount of local donations as it was well known to receive relatively large amounts of money from more influential and financially solvent Khmers. In this manner, it is an atypical *wat* as it is situated within a village/commune yet lacks the interpersonal connections that have historically been associated with local Buddhist monasteries.



The *wat* lies south of the main road between Kampot town and Kep, set back among local houses with rice fields to the south. Built in 1998, the *wat's* high school

buildings and dormitories dominate the grounds while the *vihara*, or sanctuary (small in comparison to the number of monks and other less populated *wats*), is set against a pond to its east but lacks the dominating appearance seen with other *wats*. The *wat's* overall structural layout also underlines its main function: as the province's Buddhist high school and as an administrative centre. The *wat* also contains one of the numerous official memorials to those slain under the Khmer Rouge regime. The remains are housed within a shrine next to the *vihara*, which is more elaborate than the numerous unofficial memorials scattered throughout the country within rural and urban *wats*.

Given its size and status among local villagers, the *wat* also has a different status among monks. Most are there for school and many have no connection with the area as they came from other parts of the province. It was, therefore, not their 'home' *wat* and this mindset was palpable in the daily comings and goings of monks collecting alms or attending classes. This may contribute to the lack of patronage by locals on a daily basis compared to other *wats*, as most monks are busy with school. Often one would see local friends of the monks stopping by to catch-up or to 'hang out' in between their classes, but not see the same number of older Khmers socialising with each other or the abbot as in Kompong Dtrou Lite. However, the *wat* does house more stupas than others in the area, many belonging to wealthy Khmers wishing to have their remains interned therein.

Krong Kep

Kep lies within Krong Kep municipality, 25 km outside of Kampot town. It was originally organised in 1908 during French colonial rule to be the seaside resort for French colonialists and their families. The name 'Kep' came from the French name for the area '*Le Cap*'. Legend has it that a former king named Sa Kor Reach put a powerful spell on a military commander at Angkor Thom (the ancient walled city within the Angkor Wat complex) then stole the commander's white horse and fled with his troops to the southwest of the country. Upon approaching the sea, he was surrounded by more of the commander's troops who had been chasing him. Seeing them approach, he quickly got on the horse which reared, throwing the king off along with his saddle. When the commander's troops were nearly upon him he climbed upon the horse again and fled leaving the saddle behind. The area became known as 'Kep Seh' or 'saddle' and eventually shortened to 'Kep.'

Following independence from France in 1953 and during the reign of King (later known as Prince) Sihanouk (he stepped down in order to run for office, ruling the country until his overthrow in 1970) the area was a popular attraction for wealthy Khmers and was the favourite retreat of the Prince. With the coming of the Democratic Kampuchea regime, the area saw widespread destruction resulting in the dismantling of villas by Khmer Rouge and later Vietnamese troops occupying the country after their invasion in 1979. Although the area is a mere shadow of its former self, it has retained some of its former status among older Khmers. Walking along the main road past the remaining buildings still standing one clearly sees the scars of war tattooed upon them. Burned, bullet ridden structures remain standing as reminders of the conflict as the area

slowly attempts to regain its former status.

Prey Thom Commune and Kompong Dtrou Lite Village

Prey Thom commune lies approximately 20km south of Kampot town within Krong Kep municipality containing the villages of Kompong Dtrou Lite, Damnak Chang'aeur, and Thmei. As with the surrounding communes, Prey Thom's commune chief belonged to the dominant CPP political party. The commune is much more rural than Chum Kriel containing 444ha of cultivated rice land, all wet season and rainfed, producing 666mt of rice annually. The commune contained more families as well: 1,478 made up of 3,597 females and 3,387 males. The total number of families within Kompong Dtrou Lite village was 349 made up of 880 females and 806 males; 107 females and 100 males between 0-5 years; 246 females and 221 males between 6-14 years; 64 females and 62 males aged 15-17 years; 414 females and 382 males aged 18-65 years, and 49 females and 41 males over 65 years old (Ministry of Planning, 2004) (while no reason was cited for the specific age group of '15-17', this is the age group when young people often finish or leave school, enter into the workforce, or as noted above, join the monastery).

Although Kompong Dtrou Lite village was more rural than Chum Kriel, there was greater access to private and public man-made water sources: 61 families had access to piped water, private wells, or ring taps year round, 162 families had access to public wells and water taps, and 126 families relied on ponds, rainwater or rivers. Wells and water taps provided half of the usable water for the village with the rest coming from the dam to the north or from rainwater. There were irrigation canals running along the

highways both going south towards Kep and southeast towards Vietnam but during the dry season they became unusable. However, the canal to the west of the highway to Kep was usually filled due to better conditions and served the fields immediately surrounding it. While there was no approved right of access, informants told me that, in general, one used the water from the canal or well near one's home. The dam located to the north of Kompong Dtrou Lite was dry throughout my research aside from when the rainy season began and even then was only slightly filled. The fact that the year I was there was noted as one of the driest in decades also forced me to re-evaluate some of the irrigation issues I was initially interested in.

Prey Thom has many other ethnic communities aside from Khmers living near such as Muslim Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese. As noted above, a mosque was located halfway between Prey Thom and Kampot town and another was being reconstructed immediately outside of Kep. The area, as with seemingly everywhere in Cambodia, is surrounded by rice fields with similar dimensions to those within Chum Kriel. Most villagers were rice farmers generally tending their fields themselves or receiving help from family members, however, outside labour was regularly employed. Outside work was also engaged in by some males, specifically within salt fields to the northwest, while females often sold baked goods at the local market nearby.

As in Chum Kriel, most villagers did not own a great deal of land but noted that many 'rich' Khmers and ethnic Chinese owned greater tracts to the west closer to the sea (as well as having more sophisticated irrigation works). Some also noted that it was not uncommon to own fields as far away as ten kilometres. The division of labour regarding harvesting the fields has not changed dramatically from pre-war accounts (see Ebihara

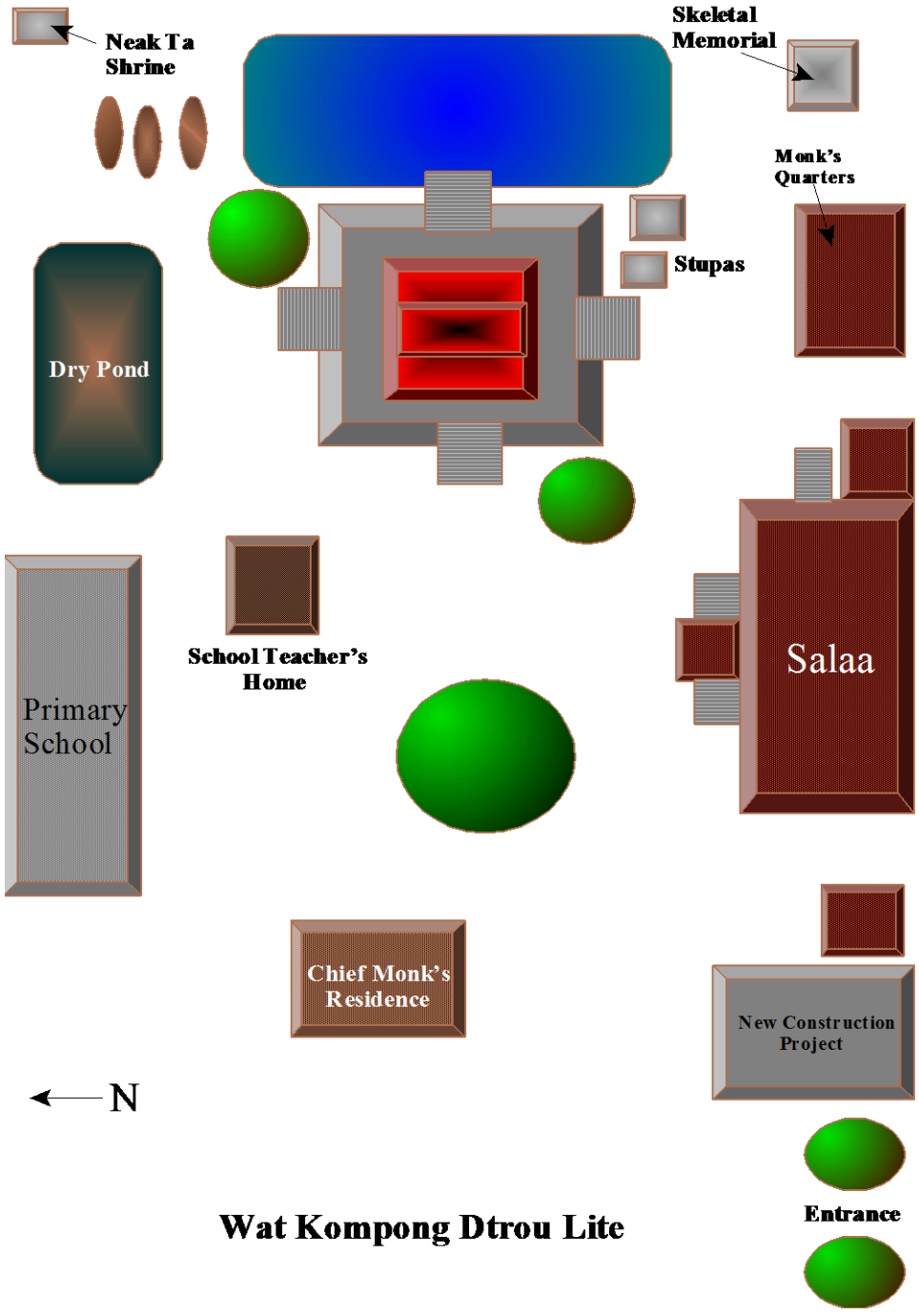
1968) with females tending to the planting and weeding of rice and males the ploughing and harvesting of it. Young men and women were said to still marry early (from sixteen years old on) although this trend, as with monastic service, is changing. None of the younger informants I worked with were married (most were in their early twenties) citing education or employment as causing the delay, yet still most accepted that their parents would have a large say in whom they would eventually wed. There was previously another *wat* in the commune to the southeast of Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite named Wat Kaio-aa-Saan after a village of the same name. Many Khmers were said to have been killed at the *wat* and the site was believed to hold large amounts of gold, now buried, which the Khmer Rouge were known to have searched for in vain.

Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite

The *wat* of my initial research, Kompong Dtrou Lite, is set off from road 6-10a which meanders east and southeast towards Vietnam. The *wat*, along with Wat Chum Kriel, is of the larger *Mahanikaya* order as opposed to the much smaller *Dhamayut* (there are two orders in the country described in detail in section 3.2, however, locals did not know of any *Dhamayut wats* within the area) and generally is home to local young men as well as the occasional monk passing through or visiting family and friends. It is located eight kilometres northwest of Kep and 20km from Kampot town further north. It was first constructed in 1897 by a man named Chung who was the *wat's* first abbot and also known as the 'Teacher of Sutra-Slekrut'.

Despite being destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, the *wat* continues to serve the commune in the same location. During the Democratic Kampuchea regime the *vihara*

was used as an execution centre only to be destroyed later as the war dragged on. The *wat* and its structures were rebuilt from 1998 to 2000 through donations by Prime Minister Hun Sen whose name is printed upon the *vihara's* façade along with donations by expatriate Khmers who also enjoy recognition on the walls of the *salaa* (communal centre/dining hall). There are also several stupas housing the ashes of well-off locals along with graves of less solvent villagers, northeast of the *vihara*.



Although no one was quite sure how many people perished, 'hundreds' were said to have disappeared with only their bones left to bleach in the sun as they were scattered

about the local fields. The abbot, who is 74 years old and a monk for over twenty years, decided to retrieve the bones and construct a small shrine for them adjacent to the *vihara*. Prior to the Democratic Kampuchea regime, the *wat* had a Buddhist primary school as well as more resident monks. Currently, a 'temple-school' is at the *wat* educating both boys and girls from the surrounding villages. Temple-schools are a normal fixture of most *wats* as they have been throughout the centuries. The *wat* is not as large as those closer to urban areas and houses the school, *vihara*, *salaa*, and smaller residences for monks[1].

Prior to the Khmer Rouge regime coming to power in 1975, the *wat* had rice fields stretching northward almost as far as the local dam, but after the PRK government was installed and land ownership was in disarray, locals tried to claim the land for themselves. The commune chief claimed the land for the *wat* although it was no longer standing but eventually lost it to the government after the PRK established land reforms and confiscated the fields. While small, Kompong Dtrou Lite is a popular *wat* within the area with many locals from Kampot and Kep attending the numerous Buddhist festivals held throughout the year. And as with most *wats*, there is a large pond to the rear of the *vihara* where locals retrieve water when needed on an informal basis. Locals come and go daily amidst older members of the *sangha* retreating to the *salaa* to socialise or speak with the abbot while school children attending classes at the *wat's* elementary school clamour about the grounds between classes.

The difference between the two *wats*, not only in size but in attendance, was

1 Wats near more populated urban areas are often larger due to the number of people they serve, the number of young men living in them (especially for school), and the amount of donations they bring in such as from political patrons.

always apparent. As will be addressed below, the local perceptions of them varied as did their relative influence upon local politics, religiosity, and the role of the monastic order on the daily lives of villagers. Although this study addresses issues of power and identity within the monkhood, they are examined within the broader issues of the reconstruction of the monastery post-Khmer Rouge and the destruction they brought upon the wider Khmer society. As a religious institution that has historically held an important position as an educator, political advisor, political tool, social centre, and means for social advancement among others, its destruction not only meant an end to the politico-religious power it held but also an end to the one constant of Khmer identity.

Just as every village or commune had a *wat* to attend to the social and religious needs of local villagers, its destruction meant a shift in local perceptions of power and religious identity. The destruction, both physically and psychologically, of a village's centre of *sacred* power through the expansion of a *profane* one (Durkheim 1915 [1912]) via the Democratic Kampuchea regime reconfigured historical associations of religious and political power and perceptions of Khmer identity, particularly for males within generations raised after 1979. As will be seen, while some associations have remained (such as education and the role of monks as a 'real' voice against corruption within the government) others (the role of folk beliefs and/or other competing ideologies, for example) have changed the influence the local *wat* has on village life.

Khmer Cosmology: The Great and Little Traditions of Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia stands at the crossroads for various migratory groups moving from Southern Asia. As Mon-Khmer peoples moved down from southwestern China, throughout present-day Thai, Laos, Vietnam, and eventually Cambodia to the Mekong Delta (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:5), the differences between the indigenous beliefs of these migratory groups and the later assimilation of Indic traditions were gradually reconciled. The belief in spirits, the most common of which is officially known as *anak-ta-wat* and popularly known as *neak ta* or *arak*, requires ceremonies to be performed annually with variations and similarities practiced by disparate indigenous groups (http://www.ngoforum.org.kh/Land/Docs/indigenous_people.htm, accessed 12 Nov. 05). *Neak ta* often represent national historical figures, local individuals of high standing, or may be called simply '*neak ta neak ta*' if no name is known. They may also reside within structures (houses, *wats*, the royal palace, etc.) but generally are distinct from common spirit or ancestral shrines found in front of homes or businesses throughout the region.

According to Chouléan, *neak ta* are the most omnipresent figures in the supernatural world of the Cambodian countryside with some images fusing the amorphous and the figurative symbolising of their fundamental connection to the soil (2000). The soil's fertility, based on the model of human sexuality, is credited to the first ancestor to clear the forest and seed the land while *neak ta* represents the fertile village space symbolised as an object of worship (ibid). They are associated with the present and affect physical health, rainfall, and harmonious relations within a given area. Reynolds describes the association with soil transcending folk beliefs to include Thai

reliquary stupas as Theravada Buddhist versions of the more public folk deity within the soil (in Woodward 1993:88-89). The ubiquity of local folk gods within nature leads Woodward to conclude that Thai stupas incorporate this connection to the soil with Buddhism, making the deceased for whom the stupa was constructed the Buddha of the soil upon which the stupa stands, a connection similar to that of Chinese altars with the soil (ibid 89).

Knowledge of spirits is passed down via the parents and village/*wat*. Thus, the level of knowledge and dedication to spirits varies accordingly. The ubiquity of local spirits and their place within Khmer history can be discerned by the following creation story told to me by a man in his early 20s who was living in Prey Thom commune and visiting a friend at Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite: In the beginning there were originally only two *neak ta*, *Neak Ta Dtuek* (water) and *Neak Ta Phnom* (mountain). Within the land where they resided, there lived a small family with a beautiful daughter. One day the father was approached by *Neak Ta Phnom* for the daughter's hand in marriage. The father agreed, and the two were soon wed. However, *Neak Ta Dtuek* heard of this and grew very angry and decided to create a vast flood creating a huge lake that in turn killed scores of people. *Neak Ta Phnom*, having greater powers than *Neak Ta Dtuek*, responded by creating a huge mountain holding the lake on top thus defeating *Neak Ta Dtuek* and saving the people.

While villagers near Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite widely believed in *neak ta* (including Muslims and Christians), near Wat Chum Kriel there were less conspicuous displays of belief. As *neak ta* are connected with the soil and Kompong Dtrou Lite's economy (as with the rest of the country) revolves around agriculture, the need to

placate them during times of economic stress (droughts, for example) is more apparent. Chum Kriel, on the other hand, is large and closer to an urban centre and has more of a mixed economy (trade and agriculture). As it was not attended as much by locals as Kompong Dtrou Lite and was viewed as a 'rich' *wat*, only on special occasions were ceremonies conducted at its own 'skull shrine' despite the fact that it is listed as one of three official memorials in the province (no. 36, site no. 070701). Kompong Dtrou Lite was the opposite: *neak ta* ceremonies were performed routinely (the Buddhist Sabbath -- *T'ngai Seul*, major festivals, and monthly by locals/*sangha*) although their 'skull shrine' was a simple shed with two shelves on either side, haphazardly filled with skulls and bones and not the same elaborate display of Chum Kriel (with bones placed in an organised pattern with a map of the country and other adornments).

What folk beliefs lacked the Great traditions compensated for as they grew in prominence within the early Khmer empires. Hinduism, and to an extent Buddhism, had already taken on courtly favour by the time of the first great Khmer kingdom, Funan (Hall 1955:19). As Brahman priests conducted Vedic sacrifices their power within the court grew yet their relevance outside of the court varied according to the level of control the court held over a given region. A region within the court's sphere of influence would likely be under greater control as regards bureaucracy (e.g., taxes and conscription) and ceremonial rituals (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:170-174). The sparing use of politico-religious monuments -- the physical manifestation of the king's/religion's dominance -- was limited to centres of power. This is a logical feature of a society where "hinterland populations are dispersed and where the segment of the population whose loyalty is critical…is sufficiently small to be controlled through the distribution of

benefits" (Bronson 1977:51).

Development of Theravada Buddhism within Southeast Asia

The development of Theravada Buddhism within Sri Lanka can be traced back to the third century BC through the work of the monk Mahinda as recognized by the Pali texts (Snelling 1991:261). As with many new religions, Theravada Buddhism adopted many of Sri Lanka's indigenous gods and customs. In Sri Lanka, the Great tradition of the royal court and Little tradition of the masses formed a more or less integrated system from the earliest times (Bechert 1970:775). Nevertheless, over time local deities were slowly replaced by the Buddha in importance as the Pali texts soon came to dominate the island and royal court.

The ruler at this time, King Parakramabahu, pushed Theravada Buddhist missionaries from Sri Lanka with zeal. Under his reign the *sangha* was revitalized and the missionary work he backed had a lasting influence on Southeast Asia. Delegations from the island would visit and study in Sri Lanka and reinforced the religion within Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (Dewaraja 2001). Although Theravada Buddhism would come to dominate Cambodia, religion from the early kingdom of Funan on was an amalgamation of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Hindu beliefs, and local animistic practices and deities that are still recognized today.

The Buddhist conception of kingship and polity originally realised under Asoka later constituted the model found throughout Southeast Asia (Suksamran 1977:5). Early Buddhism linked itself to a macro-cosmology or 'galactic polity' in Tambiah's (1976) words that yoked religion with its monks and believers to a socio-political order that

envisioned the king as the accentuating principle. This contrasted with Brahmanical traditions in which its internal paired terms were complimentary and dialectically strained with ambiguities (ibid 5). The attraction of Theravada Buddhism for Southeast Asian rulers was its social and cultural cohesive qualities (Ling 1979:29). Monks in turn were attracted to the king as a protector and propagator of the faith and were expected to combine morality with power (ibid). The ancient system of patron-client relationships and regional interpretations of power played well into Theravada Buddhism and the concept of the *devarãja* giving rulers the cosmological right to rule.

The different 'bodies' of the Buddha also developed in Sri Lanka and further on throughout Southeast Asia. One body of the Buddha that provides the basis for the life of the historical Buddhist community is the *dhammakaya* as scripture and *rupakaya* as relic, reliquary stupa, or reliquary image. A second body has a more stereological importance: the Buddha as founder of the faith and modelled salvation as the *dhamma* as scripture on the one hand and the *dhamma* as a path to enlightenment on the other (Reynolds 1977:388). The *dhammakaya* and *rupakaya* gained their place in the fifth century BC between the completion of the canon and the translation of the Sinhalese commentaries into Pali. The more orthodox texts state that the supernormal bodies of the Buddha manifest attainments directly relevant to those seeking to become fully perfected *arahats*. Less orthodox (i.e., more yogic) interpretations see the bodies manifesting attainments directly relevant to an individual's goal of achieving a status that cannot be distinguished from Buddhahood (ibid 376, 388).

Buddhist Cosmology

Work on Theravada Buddhist cultures in Southeast Asia has centred on the 'Great' and 'Little' traditions where the 'Great' concepts are interpreted in the daily experiences and popular beliefs of the countryside. Obeyesekere (1963) sees the above canonical traditions as a framework for the popular beliefs of the masses and playing an important role in their understanding of broader concepts of being. Ames (1964) argues that the canonical and local forms of Buddhism are both within *lokotarra*, the world of the sacred focused on earning merit, as opposed to the magical or profane *laukika* practices focused on achieving relief in everyday life.

Tambiah's study of spirit cults in Thailand (1970) and Obeyesekere's research on the various spirit cults of Sri Lanka (1966) sought to demonstrate that the syncretism of local beliefs within Buddhism continues through the journey into 'modernity'. Obeyesekere also contends that while monks symbolise the *formal ideal* of renunciation of the world, the *devas,* or powerful deities in the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon, are intermediary deities who "assist the worshipper with material wealth -- good crops, health, etc. in one's present existence" (1972:64). These are in contrast to the *yakkas* (demons) and other evil spirits who cause misfortune (ibid). Further, Buddhist doctrine allows for a rallying point for national unity whereas pacifying *devas* resolves anxieties on an individual basis: "The worship of the Buddha is a public affair: the worship of the deva is private" (ibid 76).

Spiro referred to these interlocking systems as the *nibbanic* and *kammatic* aspects found within Burmese Buddhism forming one syncretistic religion (1970:12,186). *Nibbanic*, or canonical Buddhism, differs from *kammatic* Buddhism

where merit can be transferred between individuals as well as to the deceased in the days after death. Spiro further noted a third system, the *apostrophic*, that revolves around curing illness and protection from demons/danger (ibid 12). Ling connected these aspects of folk beliefs and Buddhism with the Sinhalese and Thai demonological orientation of animism, or local folk beliefs, to the pantheon of Brahmanic deities of Vedic literature (1962:20, 21). The resolution of these intertwining beliefs may also be due to what Gombrich calls "Protestant Buddhism", one of the changes within Sri Lankan Buddhism in response to Protestant Christian missionary activities within the last 150 years (1988:74).

What echoes through Theravada Buddhism within the various Theravada cultures is the betterment of ones *kamma* in this life to secure a better position in the next and not necessarily the quest for *nibbana* which is normally associated with the privileged classes. Indeed, the concept of *anatta* may not fully be understood or accepted as the extinguishing of the self. As with Gombrich (1971) and Vickery (1984), my research has found similar ideas within Khmer conceptions of *nibbana* as something possible but not likely to occur within one's present lifetime. The focus instead is on improving one's *kamma* for the next life which will hopefully find you in a better existence -- more wealth, 'luck', freedom from hardship, etc.

Monks, (who are generally assumed to have greater reserves of *kamma*) when queried responded with a similar type of 'wait and see' attitude. This is a reasonable response since conspicuous boastfulness would itself be a demeritorious act; the perception of others by my informants often centred on their current position as well as their past acts. The abbot of Kompong Dtrou Lite was seen as having a particularly high

degree of merit because he had served the community for a long time and took it upon himself to collect the bones of victims of the Khmer Rouge and build a shrine for them (it is interesting to note that the abbot of Chum Kriel, while highly respected, was also noted for his power and authority -- as well as political connections -- which instilled a certain amount of fear within younger monks).

However, even those who served in the monastery at one time and continued to serve their communities viewed their next existence as influenced by folk beliefs. The intervention of those beliefs in determining one's 'place' in the afterlife can occur when their 'place' within a local community or *wat* is well established. My former assistant who was previously a monk for seven years and still thought about re-entering the monastery described this connection well. After relating how some particularly devout monks came back as *neak ta* (officially known as *neak ta wat*) of the temple in which they served, he described how the abbot of his former *wat* wanted him to return to the monastery to take over after his death. The abbot told him that he was a very devout Buddhist and would be a good choice for the position. However, he was somewhat apprehensive since after death he "did not want to come back as a spirit [within the *vihara*]."

Macro-Buddhism

Tambiah speaks of two types of Buddhism at the macro-level: one as a historical religion with a range of religious texts and changes in institutional forms over the years, and the other as a contemporary religion including the texts and historically sanctified customs that are integral parts of the on-going system (1970:374). Within examinations of the religion two more links need to be addressed: continuities, or the use of past texts and rituals that persist through time, and the transformation of the habits of monks and laymen. The Pali canon (Pali being the historical language of Theravada Buddhism), for example, was the scriptural expression of the ancient sect, *Vibhajjavadinh*, set in writing at the Mahavihara monastery in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka in 20BC (ibid 323-333).

Basic Buddhist doctrine holds that the concepts of *kamma*, *samsara* (the cycle of life, death, and rebirth), *nibbana*, and *dhukka* (suffering) are all embedded within Buddhist cosmology. This cosmology finds its expression within agriculture charting geography and defining the architecture of sacred space expressed in material symbols that are manipulated through rituals (ibid 323-335). Agricultural rituals express cosmology in action as seen through the growing cycle as affected by the transfer of the farmer's *kamma* into agricultural success. The actors in rituals involve specific groups: laymen and the ascetics. For the former, ritual acts are the outward symbols of the inner state. For the latter, performance of disciplinary acts are directed inward upon the self to gain mastery over the outer world (Tambiah 1970:335).

Within a macro-model of cosmology and the universe there can be gleaned innumerable world systems and galaxies each with its own sun, moon, and earth containing continents and oceans surrounding a central mountain, Mt. Meru (the sacred

mountain in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism). Within this macro-model there are a further 31 planes of existence found within the *Kama Loka* (form with sensual desire), *Rupa Loka* (form with no desire), and *Arupa Loka* (no form or desire). The *Kama Loka* contains eleven *Loka*: six heavens and five worlds (four inhabited by people and one 'ultra'-hell made up of eight major hells). The first heaven is below the summit of Mt. Meru watched over by four guardians (*lokapala*) of the world. The second heaven exists on the summit of Mt. Meru where the god Indra resides. These two impinge on the world of humans. The four worlds contain both people and animals and contain the *Asuras*, or the arch-enemies of gods living under Mt. Meru (Tambiah 1970:336-337).

These individuals engage in contests with the gods represented by the ancient Hindu myth the 'Churning of the Sea Milk' representing the nectar of life the gods took away from the *Asuras* represented in Buddhist and Hindu architecture such as Angkor Wat (Mannikka 1996:32-33). The forms of existence -- gods, demons, humans, animals, ghosts, souls in hell -- all can be reborn into another but one can only reach *nibbana* if they are human. However, *Lokottara*, or liberation from sentient existence, is different from rebirth. The rebirth of Siddhartha Gautama, or historical Buddha, constituted the appearance of the fourth Buddha. He was preceded by *Kakusandra*, *Konagamand*, and *Kassapa* in this aeon and seven in the previous (Tambiah 1970:340, 342).

Theravada Buddhism recognises that Buddha is neither a god nor a man because he is believed to be higher than both. Gods in Buddhism are the counterparts to pious Buddhist kings working as mediators rather than autonomous powers. Relics serve as vehicles for praising Buddha. By paying homage to them you gain merit by praising the extinct man. They are symbols that act as a "field of merit and men by their own ethical

efforts can plough, plant, and produce fruits in it" (Tambiah 1970:345).

Bodhisattvas are an entirely different class of individuals in heaven and more akin to 'Buddhas to be'. Before making appearance in human form they exist in the 'heaven of delight' only to descend to Earth at the appropriate time. These individuals are on the threshold of becoming a Buddha and bear the 32 markings symbolising him. The *Boddhisatva Maitreya* who currently resides in heaven is revered by all Buddhists as the coming saviour and said to have been elected by the Buddha to be his successor (Tambiah 1970:343).

* * * * *

Buddhism within Cambodia has seen dramatic changes unlike those seen in most areas of the Buddhist world. The once ubiquitous rural *wat* and the place of monks as educated and politically influential figures throughout the countryside were dissected from Khmer culture during the Democratic Kampuchea regime of the Khmer Rouge. Its subsequent reconstruction has been slow but the local *wat* is once again a common sight upon the Cambodian landscape. Historically it has been the centre of village life and vehicle for educational and social advancement for young men as well as a medium by which local villagers can gain merit, thus improving their *kamma* and chance for a better existence after death.

However, as will be seen, modern ideas of patronage and service have changed in the eyes of many. Patronising a *wat* for some has returned to what it was pre-war. For others, the *wat* and, indeed, Buddhism no longer hold importance given the perceived inability of the religion and its institutions to somehow stop the tragedy that befell the country. For some young men, service within the local *wat* potentially provides a means

to make merit for themselves and their families just as it has done for centuries, while for others, service is not so much a normal part of everyday rural life but a means by which they can retreat from it.

Many changes within the monastery were already underway with the modernisation the country was experiencing pre-1970, particularly through French colonialism and Thai influences upon Cambodian Buddhism such as the introduction of the *Dhamayut Nikay* sect. These influences in many ways brought about a schism in many Khmer minds regarding the syncretism of Buddhism and the various religious traditions which are found throughout the country. Specifically, Harris (2005) notes the differences between Buddhist modernism which focused specifically on those aspects of behaviour and thought authorised by the Pali canon, and traditionalists who opposed such reform measures. Modernist movements pushed forward by members of the *Dhamayut* sect also at times cooperated with colonial powers in reforming monastic education and administration which were not necessarily supported by all members of the order, some of whom were strongly opposed to it (ibid).

While many French scholars such as Leclère in the late nineteenth century attempted to document Buddhist relics and manuscripts, reformist movements at the same time were attempting to "cleanse" religious practice of "false" superstitious practice (Edwards 2004:67). Later, other French scholars such as Coedes, Poree-Maspero, Delvert, and others studied such aspects of Khmer historical traditions and French colonial reforms on education. The Thai King Chulalongkorn's decision to modernise temple schools in 1884 (Kalab 1976:67) resulted in provinces neighbouring the country adopting similar practices. To offset this Thai influence and push their own

modernising agenda, the French adopted comparable measures in 1908 which were accepted by Cambodians (Forest 1980:158).

Bizot must also be noted for his work on the more esoteric aspects of Cambodian Buddhism compared with the orthodoxy found in neighbouring Theravada nations. Harris (2005) notes that Bizot's work on extra-canonical Buddhist texts and the more esoteric traditions within the religion disregarded many aspects of the modernist movement as merely political. However, Bizot's work is important in demonstrating that Southeast Asian Buddhism should not be viewed merely through the lens of Pali textual traditions of Sinhalese Mahavihara Theravada Buddhism (Swearer 2004:70). Crosby (2000) described Bizot's work on the intermingling of various traditions in pre-modern Buddhism including examples of language representing the complexity and characteristics of the micro and macro along with the dharmic quality of language itself. She showed how Bizot's research demonstrated that Cambodian Buddhism has been influenced by early esoteric Tantric elements similarly seen within Buddhist practice in Thailand and Laos (ibid).

The Thai and French influences on Buddhism in Cambodia were dramatic and, along with the modernisation the country was experiencing, transformed religious practice and education. In this study I am not attempting to diminish the importance of these influences or suggest that Buddhism remained static only to dramatically change with the coming of the Khmer Rouge. However, one cannot dismiss the huge loss of knowledge in the form of personnel and literature during the DK regime and the influence this has had in the religion's reconstruction. What is interesting to note, though, is that France and Thailand are still influencing Cambodian Buddhism given

France's economic aid and Thailand's help in training monks and providing materials for education.

In chapter two I will address the broader, historical development of Cambodia. This discussion will focus on some key regional influences on Khmer society and religion before moving on to more recent developments in Cambodian history. It will also include the role of the monastery as both a legitimising and competing institution to various indigenous and foreign powers. I will then discuss the temple's role historically as an institution for education and the impact this has had on local conceptions of *power* and *identity*.

Chapter three will cover the daily life of monks, fundamentals of the monastery and its modern place as a centre for education. In chapter four I will address the reconstruction and political legitimacy of the *wat* post-civil war, its early connections with the Khmer Rouge, and the political versus religious associations Cambodian governments have created in the re-establishment of the monastery. Chapter five will address issues of *time*, *space*, and the *wat* as a centre for religious and social expression. In chapter six I will discuss various festivals held throughout the year and the role of merit-making activities and the economic and political ramifications they have for monks and lay personnel alike. Chapter seven will cover the role of the other belief systems within Cambodian Buddhism, specifically the role of folk beliefs and their historical and contemporary influence on rural Khmer society and the diversity and change that has occurred since the end of Democratic Kampuchea. While this study addresses the Buddhist monastery, the historical importance of Hindu and local folk beliefs on the issues noted above is important given that their place within Khmer

cosmology is often overlooked, particularly in the aftermath of the destruction of a Great tradition such as Buddhism.

Local folk beliefs in many ways continue to dictate conceptions of time and space within Khmer cosmology, specifically their importance in regulating irrigation, ceremonies, and agriculture as well as acting as a coping mechanism and cultural bridge with pre-1975 events. Their continuity in the face of Buddhism's destruction and haphazard reconstruction demonstrates the level of ingrained importance they have locally as Cambodia's 'first religion'. I will conclude with a discussion on the role of politics and its influence on the future of Cambodian Buddhism and the local Buddhist temple/monastic community. As will be seen, Khmer kings have used Khmer cosmology as a tool for justifying their claim to a divine status throughout the country's history. The current involvement of governing powers within the monastery and upon its *sangha* has had the effect of shaping its own historical place as protector of the monastery even though many high ranking officials were involved in its destruction as former members of the Khmer Rouge. Whether the monastery will have the influence in the future to help in the reconstruction of civil society depends on its ability to retain/regain its cultural identity as a religious vehicle as well as its role as the local voice for rural villagers.

2. Cambodian Historical and Contemporary Development

The monastery has come a long way since it was allowed to return in the early 1980s and has once again become an important institution in the lives of most Khmers. Arguably, its most important role is in training young Khmer males to become monks and thus carry on the traditions that have buoyed villages throughout the centuries. Monks are also indispensable given their training in the *dhamma* and Pali sutras and for merit-making activities designed to benefit one's current and future existence and the well being of one's ancestors. This chapter will begin with a discussion of Southeast Asian and Cambodian history, economic determinants, and the traditional system of authority as it relates to the local Khmer populace, villages, and wider political influence. As Cambodia has unfortunately come to be associated with the events from 1975-1979, this is intended to give the reader a better understanding of a country that was at one time one of the most powerful empires on Earth. It is also meant to demonstrate that many of the associations of power and those who have historically wielded it, are not fixed in time but fluid, transferring between early monarchies and later authorities.

This chapter also includes a discussion of Khmer education and its development over the years and its impact on Cambodia's recent history. By 'education' I am referring to the local, regional, and state controlled transmission of knowledge which revolved around Buddhism and the place of the Buddhist *wat* as the centre for religious, social, and political power. I am including a discussion of education given the *wat's*

historic role as the primary educational institution within local villages and the means by which young males could receive an education and raise their social status. However, education was largely shaped by the status of the monarchy as apex of the state influencing the manner in which it would be implemented -- who was eligible, for example. Education post-Khmer Rouge under the eye of the Vietnamese after their 1979 invasion, was done not only through traditional schooling but symbolically through memorials presenting the latter as liberators and friends and not the historic enemy which many Khmers still believe. The construction of these memorials has been part of the level of conformity the PRK and subsequent governments have retained over the 'suitable' history presented throughout the country. These, along with the evidence of Khmer Rouge atrocities, will be addressed in regard to their applicability to the re-establishment of education and what is and is not considered historically suitable.

Technological, Historical, and Cultural Development:

Agriculture and Irrigation

The two common denominators that stand out most readily in the region are rice and the irrigation systems employed in its production. The growth of polities in Southeast Asia, based partly or wholly on agrarian economies, required even greater surpluses of rice as well as irrigation schemes ensuring its production, harvest, and distribution (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:147). This found fruition at different levels throughout the area, resulting in the preclusion of a centralised bureaucracy in some countries where local lineages and temples guarded their autonomy vis-à-vis the larger state (Geertz 1973:335). According to Wittfogel, the creation of large scale hydraulic

societies was dependent upon the organisation of labour which in turn led to the formation of more complex political structures (1957:18). His model posited that farmers eager to cultivate greater areas of land were forced to invoke organisational mechanisms that required them to "work in cooperation with their fellows and subordinate themselves to a directing authority" (ibid). While this type of organisational structure could cover a country's entire population, it did so only when a population's economic level was above that of subsistence based economies outside of areas of strong rainfall but below poverty based industrial ones (ibid 12).

Although much work has been done on the hydraulic societies and the elaborate irrigation schemes that developed within Southeast Asian kingdoms, the notion that the average farmer was solely dependent upon state controlled schemes has not been fully supported by the literature (Bentley 1986:289). In the case of Cambodia, the vast plateau sweeping through the middle of the country and the inevitable flooding of the giant lake, Tonle Sap, allowed for the creation of early irrigation works prior to the great structures of Angkor (Moore 1989). However, the actual usefulness of these works purely for irrigation rather than for religious purposes or a combination of the two has been debated (ibid).

And yet, the area is not only a rice producing region. The Malaccan Straits is considered one the most important shipping lanes in the world. Its position between the Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra has had enormous historical importance for traders coming from China to the east, India to the west, as well as Arab and European traders and adventurers. As Southeast Asia began to be seen as viable means of connecting the East and West, so too did foreign powers increasingly come to dominate

the affairs of the people. With the exception of Thailand, much of Southeast Asia would eventually come under the control of expansionist European powers followed by US, Soviet, and Chinese foreign military intervention.

Funan, Chen-la, and Angkor: The Great Khmer Kingdoms

The name of a 'place' is more than a label or acronym of a parcel of land but a reality that is structured, transferred and shared across generations as a symbol that roots one to the land and identity that connects one to a larger group. Cambodia, known in Khmer as 'Kampuchea', is the translation of the Sanskrit word 'Kambuja' (or 'born of Kambu'). The country was also known as 'Kamar' and 'Kimer' in Arabic and 'Ko-mien' or 'Chi-mien' in Chinese. The Chinese names 'Funan' and later 'Chen-la' also appear early in the country's history. These would come to denote the two earliest kingdoms until the coming of Angkor centuries later (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:3).

The name 'Khmer' is the result of a creation myth surrounding the formation of the 'solar' dynasty -- the first rulers of Kampuchea. In Khmer myth, the celestial being 'Mera' is said to have married an Indian Brahman named Kambu Svayambhuva, a creator title from Hindu myth. The legend states that the holy man married the Mera figure from which descended the 'solar' dynasty (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:8). Along with this 'solar' dynasty was a 'lunar' dynasty that also has a connection with India. Indian mythology has various stories regarding solar and lunar ruling lines. Northern India was historically associated with the sun, and the south with the moon. Later Khmer kingdoms would also seek this identification (ibid).

Coedes summarises a slightly different story of the founding of the first great

Khmer kingdom, Funan, by an Indian king, possibly a Brahman named Kaundinya who dreamt one night that his personal genie directed him to embark on a merchant junk (1968:37). In the morning he went to the genie's temple where he found a magical bow at the foot of a tree. Then after boarding the junk he was whisked away to a land where he fended off Soma, queen and daughter of the King of *Nagas* (large serpents replete within myth and architecture throughout the region), as she attempted to seize the ship. After he shot an arrow from his divine bow through the ship, the queen gave herself up whereupon Kaundinya took her for his wife and established himself as king (ibid).

As the region took shape the various powers in Cambodia came to be associated with military power and material wealth. Many signs of wealth were more obvious in the form of temples, palaces, and ornamental design that pervaded the area. During the three great kingdoms of Funan, Chen-la, and Angkor, envoys were sent to China with embassies being established in either country. The kingdom was known for its exotic gifts of various metals -- gold, silver, tin, and copper being among them. These gifts, existing outside the delta region, may be testimony to the level of control and influence that this early Khmer kingdom had over its neighbours (Highman 2001:25).

It was accepted for the greater part of the 20th century that Cambodia was heavily influenced by Southern India given its common connection with the ancient language Pali, Indian laws, customs, and Buddhism as well as earlier Hindu and Vedic beliefs. However, since the 1960s this view has been challenged. Although powers such as India as well as China did have an influence on the surrounding area, the term 'Indianised' paints a distorted image. Trade did flow from outlying regions, however, there is evidence to suggest that coastal Indian trading centres may have provided for the

assumption of a wholly Indianised region (Dumarcay 1995:1). Archaeological and linguistic evidence further demonstrate the main in-road to present day Thailand and Cambodia was from southern China. Archaeological evidence of rice and rice cultivating technologies also support this claim (Keyes 1977:14). Chinese records are also the only outside written sources known that chronicled the area, people, and cultural traditions.

Funan began possibly as far back as the third century AD only to be annexed by the next great Khmer kingdom, Chen-la, in the eighth century (although Chen-la had been in existence since the sixth century) (Briggs 1942:346). Angkor, established by Jayavarman II in 802 AD, was known for its famous *devarãja* cult (worship of the 'god king') and became the most powerful and famous of the kingdoms. Angkor would last until the fifteenth century but would be known at the time for being the most powerful kingdom south of China. Under Jayavarman VII (1181-1215(?)), the great site of Angkor grew in complexity with temples and buildings continuing to be erected alongside of Angkor Wat, built in the eleventh century. Jayavarman VII may have actually contributed to Angkor's decline given that his building programs drained resources and manpower and possibly impoverished the kingdom (Briggs 1942:355).

By the eleventh century Buddhism had become firmly established within Cambodian life with power extending outside of the royal houses in Angkor Wat. The status of monks played a dual role: one of acting as a legitimising element for royal power as well as a moral check on it. With the decline of Angkor in the 1400s due to continued military invasions by Thailand and Vietnam, the kingdom was reduced to a shell of its former self with Theravada Buddhism well established within the kingdom

(Peang-Meth 1991:443). With the coming of that century the political and military capability to sustain Angkor faded as did the Hindu-Buddhist theocracy which was replaced by a smaller Theravada Buddhist court (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:220).

Although contained in terms of military dominance, Cambodian rulers still practiced military incursions into neighbouring states when the opportunity arose. The kingdom would once again become a maritime kingdom known for its great wealth as it had been during the Funan era with the relocation of its ceremonial capital to Longvaek, 50 miles to the north. After a brief respite from dominating their southern neighbour, the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya eventually conquered Angkor which had been 'rediscovered' by a Khmer king who briefly moved his court back to the grounds in the mid-sixteenth century (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:221). The Thais would continue their domination and eventually sack Longvaek along with stealing two figures that were thought to contribute to Khmer might -- the statues of *preah ko* and *preah kaio*. The subsequent move to Udong meant that Thai (and increasingly Vietnamese to the south) domination of the region and influence over the Khmer court would last until the next wave of foreign forces. After the seventeenth century, Cambodia fell into its 'dark ages' isolated except for periodic invasions by Thailand and Vietnam and dependent upon Chinese commerce until eventually becoming a French protectorate in 1863 (ibid).

The French Colonial Experience and the rise of Millenarian Movements

Following the coronation of Norodom I in 1864, resentment of France's colonial presence began to emerge gaining momentum in the 1870s. The king was contemptuous of the French presence and yet acted in an oppressive manner towards the Khmer peasantry (Ayers 2000:20). As far back as the sixteenth century the French pursued the colonial ideology of assimilation, first in Africa and then later in Southeast Asia. This ideology was driven by pre-revolutionary French ideals of egalitarianism and was an attempt to dismantle indigenous institutions and governments in favour of their own. This effort, though, failed to take into account the complexities and strength of traditional institutions in Southeast Asia and resulted in the disparate states of Indochina being brought together in a weak coalition. By the 1880s, after Cambodia entered into a treaty with France allowing for French *résidents* throughout the countryside and the abolition of slavery, the French presence increased (ibid).

With the arrival of Paul Doumer as governor-general, the French mission of assimilation morphed into association allowing for indigenous institutions to have greater leeway in the governing of the country similar to British colonial policy (Ayers 2000:19-20). However, outside of the capital and provincial centres, French influence lagged behind. This was dramatically seen in the so-called 1916 affair, when angry peasants numbering as many as 100,000 ignored French colonial administrators and took their grievances directly to the king (Osborne 1978:229). The second was in 1925 with the assassination of *résident* Felix Bardez while he attempted to arrest a number of delinquent taxpayers. On both occasions, Khmers demonstrated their indifference towards colonial administrators while French misunderstandings of Khmers mistakenly

took a political issue for an economic one.

The political element was further augmented by the monastery and its resentment of French encroachment in areas which previously were the sole purview of monks, specifically education. Monks were reported to have conducted secret water rituals to incite resistance while the involvement of *nak sel*, or holy men (hermits or sorcerers), also occurred. Ileto notes the presence of these individuals before and during the French protectorate and their control over vast parts of the countryside as well as their role in fighting against foreign influences through engaging millenarian strains of Cambodian Buddhism (1999:201). Religious movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century at times centered on millenarian movements and pushed forward by *nak sel*, monks, or "those possessing merit" (Hansen 2007:55). However, while such movements were not strictly an anti-colonial pursuit, neither were they religious 'fringe' movements (ibid). Monks were seen as the keepers and purveyors of knowledge and some were believed to have the ability to engage the supernatural either through their prophecy or through the dissemination of magical amulets, tattoos, and mantras. The fact that rural monks were often involved in these rebellious activities also served as an indication of the loss of control by official Buddhism over rural monasteries and monks who often resembled rebel leaders (Ileto 1999:202).

Alongside these movements was the growing influence of the Cao Dai religion in Cochin China. In 1927, thousands of Khmers from Cambodia's eastern provinces turned towards the religion at its base in Tay-Ninh (Ileto 1999:235). Followers believed a statue of a prince on a white horse would be reborn and bring about the restoration of the country. Although the movement would ultimately be denounced by Khmer

monastic leaders and through royal decree, it demonstrated that a disillusioned peasantry was ready to turn to new religious ideologies in times of stress. Further, the connection with Cao Dai and other millenarian movements focusing on a savior figure resonated with Khmer mythology and linked these movements with a perceived reformed Indochinese Buddhism (Harris 2001:57-58). What they also shared, though, was a focus on rural dissatisfaction with present conditions as opposed to what Hansen describes as the "moral development in a cosmic time-frame" (2007:55).

While these activities strayed away from canonical Buddhism, there is also evidence of the use of prophetic texts in the early twentieth century describing the coming of Maitreya, the *bodhisattva* ('Buddha to be') known in Theravada Buddhism, which were memorized and passed down through literary-oral traditions in the monastery. These texts interpreted the contemporary political situation in the country through the context of Buddhist cosmological history (Hansen 2004:48). While these texts were known in Khmer intellectual circles, they were nonetheless disseminated widely throughout the countryside (ibid). The figure of Maitreya in Khmer culture is important to note given the historical role various beliefs and cults which surrounded the figure have played throughout the country's history. Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism both share in the belief of Maitreya, but whereas Mahayana Buddhism has multitudes of *bodhisattvas*, Theravada Buddhism generally acknowledges only Maitreya. His rise to prominence in Cambodia has been traced back to the sixteenth century when King Ang Chan used the cult of Maitreya to provide unity and direction for the kingdom. Indeed, Ang Chan's Vishnuite bas-reliefs on Angkor Wat at the time were incorporated within the cult of Maitreya representing an important symbol of the

monarch's power to protect social order (Thompson 2004:32).

The coming of Maitreya is linked to restoration, renewal, and as Thompson notes, revolution to a degree which formed part of the conception of the future Buddha (2004:16). Maitreya is believed to appear at a time when Buddhism is close to disappearing and his arrival will see the restoration of the world, bringing the reincarnation of the historical Buddha. Maitreya is acknowledged, therefore, as the individual who will not bring about new change but restore the old. His importance in millenarian movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century must be understood in this light as political resistance towards French colonialism gained greater ground. His historically important role within Khmer cosmology would have been understood by a peasantry if placed within the context of revolt against colonial rule and a renaissance of Khmer society.

Twentieth Century Cambodia

Towards the end of French control of Cambodia in the 1940s, King Norodom Sihanouk took advantage of France's troubles in Vietnam. With military resistance by the Vietnamese and France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Cambodia was in a position to push for greater concessions and an eventual end to colonial status. The Geneva Conference of 1954, ended hostilities in Indochina and acknowledged the right of Laos, Cambodia, and North and South Vietnam "to play their part, in full independence and sovereignty, in the peaceful community of nations" (US Department of State 1954:163). South Vietnam was created from what was Cambodia's southern half and is still referred to as Kampuchea Krom (Lower Cambodia).

Sihanouk's eventual fall in 1970 was due to a coalition of civil servants and military officers backed by the country's few intellectuals (Evers 1973:125-126). General Lon Nol seized control and began a crackdown on dissident movements while continuing to allow American bombers to target North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces within the country. With the nation in turmoil as the American war in Vietnam spread onto its soil, the growth of insurgent hyper-Marxist movements, most notably the Khmer Rouge, gained strength as disaffected young men fled destroyed villages to fight against Lon Nol's military government. What began as a small-scale effort backed by Marxist rebels and led by Cambodian intellectuals, soon became a large scale, heavily armed force of peasants fighting against a government mired by the increased economic and physical toll of deleterious in-fighting and foreign bombings. This would eventually result in the collapse of the Lon Nol government in 1975 followed by years of genocide and mayhem under the Khmer Rouge backed Democratic Kampuchea regime led by Pol Pot as he attempted to wipe the historical slate clean and begin Cambodia's history anew.

The Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot planned to recreate what was assumed to be the state directed abundance of nature similar to China's 'Great Leap Forward' (Schwartz 1997:60). Massive irrigation works were planned with the money earned to be redirected back into farming. The Chinese lent aid in weapons and munitions to defend against possible action by Thailand and more specifically Vietnam due to their recent political fallout. Through emptying the cities and driving the people into the countryside the Khmer Rouge planned to create an agrarian empire that would use rice as currency on the world market. During this process townspeople became classified as 'New People'

and were placed under the charge of ‘Base People’ made up of the rural peasantry. Through these shifting demographics the ‘New People’ were moved into a rural setting and expected to clear land for farming -- a way of life they little understood. At the same time, ‘Base People’ who came from different parts of the country were not familiar with farming on the different soils and terrain to which they were transferred (Schwartz 1997:61).

Although model zones measuring one hectare (100sq m) were set up to impress visitors, the truth was that the planned empire was doomed to failure. This is evident in Pol Pot’s overall scheme. The scorn of local knowledge and the introduction of Chinese methods of replanting at the expense of Khmer practices ensured that appropriate methods for local rice varieties were not followed (Schwartz 1997:61). The might of Angkor, to a great extent, was due to its ability to control the one resource vital for all life -- water. The former empire’s status and power stemmed from the interlocking of Buddhism and Buddhist temples and *sanghas* as the cultural and ritual partner of water management. The connection between the two and the symbiotic relationship that was created developed the country into a formidable power. How could a hyper-Marxist regime recreate such might through massive hydraulic works without establishing the equalizing position of the Theravada Buddhist temple and *sangha* that influenced and drove localized hydraulic knowledge? The answer, of course, is that they could not. Disregarding this localized knowledge led to the collapse of agriculture and catalysed the famine that followed the Vietnamese invasion.

The US-Vietnam Conflict and the Khmer Rouge

The US led war against North Vietnam and South Vietnamese Viet Cong would become a truly regional war dragging Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and China by proxy into the conflict. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Sangkum government of Prince Sihanouk acquiesced while the post-1970 Republic of Cambodia government led by General Lon Nol authorised and aided the massive US bombing campaign of Cambodia against Vietnamese Communists as well as Cambodia's own internal enemies (Kirk 1974; Shawcross 1979:28, 33; Kimball 1998:132; Hanhimäki 2004:71). The campaign drove refugees from the countryside into an increasingly overpopulated Phnom Penh and helped contribute to the escalating support for the Khmer Communists.

After overthrowing Prince Sihanouk in 1970, General Lon Nol's government continued its fight against Khmer and Vietnamese Communists. Eventually Lon Nol, invoking Theravada Buddhism as a rallying point, declared a 'holy war' against the Vietnamese Communists leading to the widespread massacre of ethnic Vietnamese within Cambodia (Chandler 1991 [1984]:198; Ayers 2000:73). By 1975, Lon Nol's government was overthrown by the advancing Khmer Rouge (a term coined by Sihanouk) leading to almost four years of country-wide concentration camp-like conditions. Following the US withdrawal from Vietnam, the North Vietnamese, after reaching a cease-fire with the South, resumed its war and eventually toppled the South Vietnamese government in 1975 reuniting the country under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Although the Khmer Rouge were aided by the North Vietnamese Communists, the ancient tensions between the Khmers and Vietnamese would eventually surface and

sever any ideological ties they may have shared. By late 1978, the Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot, after rising tensions between the two Communist regimes, gave the Vietnamese an ultimatum to remove all troops from Cambodian territory or risk an all-out war. The Khmer Communists also had their own territorial ambitions, invading and briefly occupying parts of southern Vietnam in an attempt to reclaim Kampuchea Krom -- a stated ambition of the Khmer Rouge from earlier on (Kiernan 1997 [1996]:104-105). However, issues of identity and racial purity, so entrenched within Khmer Rouge ideology, were to dictate relations between the Khmer Rouge and rebel ethnic Khmers in southern Vietnam, the latter being viewed as 'impure' by their mere presence in Vietnam (ibid 3).

The entropic nature of Democratic Kampuchea and the racist and pathological military actions within and without the country eventually led to the defection of high ranking Khmer Rouge cadre and the formation of a force made up of fleeing Khmers (known by the acronym KNUFNS, see below) who invaded alongside the Vietnamese military on Christmas day, 1978. The eventual collapse of Democratic Kampuchea occurred shortly thereafter on January 7th, 1979, as conquering Vietnamese and the Khmer liberation force entered the capital (Etcheson 1984:190-196). Vietnam would eventually establish around 140,000 troops in Cambodia and another 40,000 in Laos during the 1980s but after the collapse of the Soviet Union it could no longer maintain its troops within its neighbour's borders. After withdrawing from Laos in 1988 and Cambodia in 1989, and experiencing post-war social and economic problems at home, Vietnam began to reform its agricultural policies while seeking to improve its image on the world stage (Tucker 1999:201-202).

Power, Education, and Social Hierarchy:

Historical Concepts of Power within Cambodia

Time-honoured notions of power in Cambodia have historically rested on a one man dominated system whereby the ruler's power was absolute. The notion of power sharing has historically been absent within the region and Khmer kings were no exception. The inclusion of religious orders within the royal court and the power they came to wield affected the broader, rural society while eventually becoming a tool of the ruling elite. The *sangha* legitimised the status of the king and the social hierarchy that emanated from it binding society together and reinforcing the monarch's right to rule (Ayers 2000:11).

Yet, this was dependent upon the complete control of all aspects of Khmer life. Institutions that posed a threat, or more accurately, could be independent would eventually become subsumed either by force or coercion. At the village level, which by and large was detached from wider concepts of 'state' and reliant on local religious institutions for spiritual and political direction, authority to a large degree rested within the local *wat*. However, this is not to say that *wats* had any physical power backing up that authority. Even so, its occupants were relatively learned, worldly, and detached from the rest of the populace lending them a legitimacy normally enjoyed by larger political entities. A means by which an individual could attain such authority was through participation in this institution and, therefore, indoctrination in its ideology which was the foundation for formal Khmer education.

Education has been a constant means of attaining status and, if the individual was ambitious enough, power. The French protectorate beginning in 1863 brought about

two models of colonial administration. The first, Cochin China, or southern Vietnam, was invested heavily in with an expansion of French educational goals. The other seen in Cambodia appeared to be the mirror opposite leading many scholars to state broadly that the French ignored Cambodia preferring to maintain it as a buffer zone against English colonial ambitions to the north. The preference for Vietnamese civil servants over Khmers and the acknowledgment by colonial administrators that the Vietnamese were more capable and willing than Khmers also blends in to this argument. However, Clayton suggests it was not necessarily the inability of Khmers to work as civil servants but their unwillingness to be a part of foreign ventures in their own country (1995). While the large number of Vietnamese students compared to Khmers that were sent to France for study in the nineteenth century suggests that the French put much more stock into the ability of the former, this must also be weighed against the notion of education for Khmers. In Cambodia, education was a means of transferring what were considered traditional Khmer values stemming from Theravada Buddhism and not necessarily practical skills and knowledge (Quinlan 1992:8).

In 1885 the French opened a college for interpreters in Phnom Penh and three language schools in provincial capitals. The men that came out of these schools formed the backbone of the French colonial administration and they often shed away their former Khmer attributes adopting the French way of life. However, their numbers remained low and families often kept their children away from French schools, perhaps due to contact with Vietnamese civil servants and newly arrived immigrants or as a means of rejecting this new French influence (Clayton 1995). This rejection was not limited to only the people, though. King Norodom did not help the French education

endeavour choosing to reject all things foreign (Vickery 1986). This resulted in the continued reliance on temple schools by Khmers with those entering French schools coming from Vietnamese immigrant families. Thus, instead of creating a colonial administration made up of French speaking Khmers, a civil service cadre of French speaking Vietnamese immigrants persisted (Clayton 1995).

By the twentieth century things began to change as King Sisowath ascended the throne. The French were given more control over the country's administration but despite numerous educational reforms, the number of Khmer graduates remained low. By 1916 mandatory attendance at French run schools (some of which contained a section for girls) was required of children living within two kilometres of them but for those living far away attendance at temple schools persisted. Three-year elementary schools and full-course schools were created, however, attendance, or perhaps acceptance of new educational reforms, remained a challenge.

Clayton (1995) describes the low level of participation in French run schools as resulting from a number of factors: the unfamiliarity of the French language; low number of qualified French and French-Cambodian teachers; a curriculum concentrating on a foreign language instead of more practical trades; and a resistance by monks to what they saw as a threat to Buddhist doctrine, being among them. Despite reforms and a genuine desire by colonial administrators to integrate Khmers into this educational system, the number of Khmer graduates never reached the same level as their Vietnamese counterparts. The fact that there were not enough qualified teachers also meant that Vietnamese teachers had to be brought in which only exacerbated the issue of trust in reforms as many Cambodian parents did not like the idea of having their children

being taught by them (Forest 1980).

The creation of secular *khum*, or communal, schools in western Cambodia based on modernised Thai temple schools in the early part of the twentieth century and the later reform of Cambodian temple schools began to reverse the mistrust of French educational reforms. These schools bridged the gap between traditional temple schools and French run schools and proved to be extremely popular in rural areas (Clayton 1995). The creation of a teacher's college in 1925 and the training of monks as teachers in temple schools also overcame the monastery's resistance to the French system, particularly as Khmer was the language of instruction (ibid). Although some have argued that the low level of Khmer participation was related to French desires to keep them out of positions of power, the fact that colonial administrators pushed for greater Khmer participation and implemented reforms demonstrates that this was not necessarily the case. Whereas the French attempted to bring Khmers into colonial administration through an expansion of the educational system, many times it was the reluctance and resistance on the part of Khmers to be a part of this new, foreign effort which hampered its progress.

The restructuring, expansion, and later deconstruction by the French, Sangkum Government of Prince Sihanouk, and Khmer Rouge regime respectively brought the ancient system that took centuries to develop to a complete stop within a matter of decades. To compound the problem post-1979 was the illegitimacy of the new PRK administration and their backers, Vietnam, as seen by powerful states that still pushed for international recognition of the DK regime that caused its destruction. Reintroducing an adequate and functioning education sector under these circumstances would be

challenging to say the least.

Khmer Education and the Buddhist Monastery

As noted, throughout much of Cambodia's history the education of Khmers was in the hands of the local temple and its occupants. The education was limited; the majority of students being young boys learning Pali Buddhist chants, most of whom were in fact training to become future monks. Study usually revolved around reading and writing Khmer, learning the Buddhist precepts and behaviour rules of propriety and some arithmetic (Gyallay-Pap 1989:258). Students also gained practical knowledge of manual labour helping monks build temples and other structures such as roads and bridges that served the temple and surrounding village (Torhorst in Clayton 1995).

As the local Buddhist temple occupied a variety of roles it was also the centrepiece of a village. Monks were generally the most educated and had a higher social position than others. The level of literacy is questionable, though, given the emphasis on rote memorisation which still persists today in temple and non-temple schools. Memorisation was the means of preserving historical knowledge, laws, and sermons of the Buddha before being transcribed into texts (Gokhale 1965:359). Even though rote memorisation and transcription of characters was the norm, in reality it meant that young boys learnt through repetition but could not necessarily read words separately. Most left the temple without the ability to read or write to any sufficient degree (Bilodeau 1955:21).

The *wat* may have been the centre of village life but it was also at the centre of the wider field of traditional expressions of state power. By the time of Jayavarman II,

the lives of villagers, who may have already been connected to the court in broader terms of taxation and conscription, were further connected as their king's ritual connection with fertility was linked to the success of future harvests. The foundation of the *devarãja* rested upon the four concepts of Buddhist kingship: the king as a *cakravartin* (a universal monarch as described in sacred texts); a *bodhisattva*; the promoter and protector of Buddhism reminiscent of Asoka; and finally as the incarnate *devarãja*, or god-king as espoused within Brahmanical traditions (Bechert 1970:766). All of the concepts were necessary for the creation of a society in the classical Indian Buddhist tradition (ibid).

Even though Theravada Buddhism was the official religion, why did the king retain this divine status? Hindu kingship was truly divine and the Brahmanical title was later adopted by the Southeast Asian kings. Khmer and Burmese cities were built to reflect this having at their centre Mt. Meru -- the sacred mountain home to Brahma and other gods at the centre of the universe in Hinduism and Buddhism. By the time Theravada Buddhism had been adopted in the region, enough of the god-king status remained and carried on with the *devarãja* (Ling 1979:30).

Social Hierarchy and the Buddhist State

Although the trappings of royal life may have escaped the masses, the position of the *wat* and the place of the king within Khmer cosmology along with the description of the world in terms of space, time, matter, and causality (Tambiah 1970:334) as the pinnacle of state and religious power, meant that the *wat* and *sangha* served a dual role. In Theravada Buddhism, *anacakka*, or the "wheel of power" is thought to be dangerous and in need of direction from *dhammacakka*, the "wheel of righteousness". When the two are working in unison, only then will a society flourish (Hinton 2004:105). While ideologically the *sangha* needed political backing, the king in turn benefited from a doctrine that incorporated him within its cosmology (Bit in Ayers 2000:11).

This perspective already fitted well with the traditional Khmer hierarchy of patron-client relationships connecting the average person to their local headman, both to their local *wat*, and the latter to the larger state bureaucracy. The king was the head of the secular and religious state interlocking the physical and spiritual lot of Khmers to the fortunes of the kingdom. In turn, the power and authority legitimised the social hierarchy of *wats* in relation to the local village and the larger state. The Buddhist doctrine of *dhamma*, merit, *Vinaya* (rules of observance), and *samsara* further cemented the king's power and, therefore, the *wat*/monk's authority as vehicles of the broader cosmology stressing obedience to the social hierarchy via the state religion.

As entrance into the monastery became a traditional stage of life for young men, their education would also become linked to the authority of the state whose patronage legitimised a temple's authority within a village. The Chinese envoy Chou Ta-Kuan who visited the kingdom in the late thirteenth century noted that the most educated class was

the religious group known as the *banddhit* or 'highest learning' (Dy and Ninomiya 2003). Although a similar system was found centuries later by European explorers, it was also amidst continued warfare and the abandonment of capitals (including Angkor). The subsequent loss of knowledge which followed marked the end of the empire's dominance as the Golden Age of Cambodia came to a close.

Later work by the French demonstrated the continuity of the *wat* where local children, usually boys, were instructed on Buddhist doctrine, precepts, traditional Khmer sutras, and folklore (Ayers 2000:12-13). While monks were forbidden from manual labour they were still instructed on practical skills needed for service outside of the *wat*, a practice that continues today. Further, the transmission of tradition helped institutionalise religious service as broader state service if not necessarily conceived of as such. As Rhum notes "the concept of 'tradition' serves as a way of legitimating practices and social arrangements," in traditional societies and acts as a "capping category" for a variety of practices and principles (1996:350, 326). Encapsulating 'tradition' and transferring 'traditional' Khmer knowledge within the religion and state reinforced conceptions of Khmer social hierarchy.

The ability to read sacred texts (generally coded on palm leaves stored at the *wat*) gave monks a high status as the voice of spiritual authority in a largely illiterate agricultural society bound to a particular area. Lacking infrastructure and dependent on the annual rains to supply adequate harvests, villagers depended on one another for mutual survival (Ayers 2000:10). The real or perceived dangers of the forest (*prei*) and those outside of their village fostered the social hierarchy connecting those of lesser means to more powerful individuals who turned to the authority of the state and

ultimately the king. Those who could engage the 'sacred' within Buddhist texts disseminated knowledge found outside of the village (a world most would probably never engage) which reinforced the sacredness of the texts and particularly those who could interpret their authority. The power relationships within this system encouraged the development of a more sophisticated monastic order able to leverage greater amounts of influence over the local peasantry and ultimately the royal court. Technically outside of normal secular life, they were not necessarily bound to the same networks of powerful patrons as an average villager yet still depended upon them for survival. Solidifying their position as bearers of the sacred was thereby maintained through the top down hierarchy of the state (Ayers 2000:12).

Mulder cites individual merit in Thailand as a "rationalisation for social prestige" that serves to explain inequality and social mobility (1973:6). Do those who are able to participate to the fullest extent within a ceremony gain more merit than those who merely attend it? The monkhood can arguably act as a boundary that restricts non-monk males but it also restricts the entire female population aside from the limited number of women (generally elderly) serving as *don-chis* (nuns). To this end we must ask how this relates to status and ultimately power within Khmer society. Within a Marxist perspective the assignment of status represented the 'have' and 'have not' of the merit world. Those who could only partially participate would, theoretically, have to work harder in order to gain the same amount of merit. In strict economic terms this would mean the allocation of either time spent in the *wat* or material produced for its members' consumption. Depending on their activity in the *wat*, the wealthy have the fiscal opportunity for greater merit-making which puts them in a higher position in relation to

insolvent and non-members of the monastery (ibid).

Although the wealthy are not the most active members of the *sangha*, they are in a position to avoid the *wat* except perhaps on holidays due to their status. Explained in religious terms, this can fuel the idea that Buddhism acts as a social inhibitor. While perpetuating the idea that those in power are there because of former meritorious acts, those without power continue to see their limited funds siphoned off through continued engagement with the *wat*. This can act as a handicap for social mobility as well as a catalyst for a backlash against the system that the Khmer Rouge touted as perpetuating it (Vickery 1984:11). Those 'rich' *wats* in turn may come to be dominated by increasingly more powerful patrons (government officials/parties) squeezing out locals. *Wats* that are 'first among equals' with an overriding voice in Buddhist politics can thus be subjected to the wider power of the state they technically are separate from.

Traditional Khmer Curriculum

Ayers cites three traditional forms of Khmer knowledge: the *chhbab*, *gatiloke*, and *Reamker* (2000:14-16). Respectively they reflected traditional poems/folk laws prescribing norms of behaviour, folk stories offering moral guidance for virtuous behaviour, and the Khmer version of the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, relating similar prescriptions (ibid). While all seem to legitimise the social hierarchy and system of reciprocal relationships (Chandler 1991 [1984]:272), they also draw on broader themes of Buddhism and an individual's position as determined by their actions and devotion to the 'middle path'. Taken together, the knowledge passed down came to form the proverbs that are replete within Khmer life. They draw on common knowledge, broad

epics, and folk wisdom to act as a template from which Buddhist theories of causality and virtue are built upon (Gokhale 1965:358). The *wat*, therefore, fused local and traditional knowledge with religious dogma shaping the development of both the education system and Cambodian Buddhism.

The two types of realities viewed by Buddhism stressed the ultimate and transcendental reality and phenomenal reality, the latter necessarily requiring a historical background. Causation being a series of inter-related events spread over vast periods of time affects humans with the arrival of a Buddha making *nibbana* possible. This is dictated by cosmic law that stressed the inherent five-fold order of the cosmos: the order of *kamma*, the seasons, life-germs, mind, and *dhamma* (ibid 357). The appearance of a Buddha is no happy accident but an inevitable occurrence in the endless chain of time made comprehensible through the study of the *dhamma* (ibid). Relating common folk tales, instructional poems, and historical epics through this Buddhist view synthesized the virtues and historical traditions of a local community within the religion. Local knowledge, therefore, became a type of Buddhist knowledge transferred from monk to novice and preached to the larger community.

Relating traditional knowledge incorporated with Buddhist teachings also sanctified or at least demonstrated the rationale for the existing social hierarchy and claims to power. Khmer proverbs thus demonstrated through Buddhist causality the relationship between the current status quo and the events that led to it. Observing proper social relationships as expressed through traditional genres also implied proper observance of the patron-client hierarchy within Khmer society. The inherent implication of this is to avoid uncertainty reinforced by the nature of village life; a

relatively isolated collection of individuals surrounded by the unknown and dangerous forest (Ayers 2000:17). To stray far away from the village or away from sanctioned knowledge was to skirt disaster or death. The development of education thus reinforced sticking to the well trodden path that recognized the 'natural' social order that flowed from the individual peasant through the patronage of more powerful figures and ultimately to the king (ibid). Reinforced by Buddhist doctrine, the acceptance of this order assured continuity as in the past where straying from it was to stray too far into the forest and risk one's survival.

The Restructuring of Education and Identity: The Rise of 'Base' Society

In her ethnographic study of Cambodian village life in 1959-60, May Ebihara noted bilateral kinship genealogy and its effects on land distribution and cultivation. She demonstrated that this effectively parcelled the land into smaller pieces that were cultivated by the nuclear family (Leach also notes a similar description of land parcelling in Sri Lanka [1961]). During the Pol Pot era, this village dynamic drastically changed. The nuclear family was split apart, parents being separated from children who were viewed as the future of the Khmer Rouge. What the Khmer Rouge did was nothing less than the transformation of everyday Cambodian life. The emptying of cities and villages occurred throughout the country and the formation of cooperatives took their place. This reorganisation meant that many husbands, wives, and children would be separated and scattered throughout different regions of the country. The reorganisation and re-categorization of social class occurred as well. This was related to the Khmer Rouge's vision of an aggrandised, quasi-mythical past, conjuring images of the once

mighty Angkor; '*Angkar*' ('The Organization', not to be confused with the kingdom of 'Angkor') was the name of the Central Committee of the Kampuchean Communist Party dominated by Pol Pot.

Agriculture was to be the product and focus of all aspects of the cooperative. Since poor peasants became socially favoured, the higher classes -- poisoned by the ills of Phnom Penh -- were viewed with suspicion and limited in their rights (McIntyre 1996:758). Further, there was also a difference in class within the cooperatives. "Full Rights" were those who could join the army, party, and hold any political position in the cooperative. "Candidates" could hold low ranking positions, while "depositees" had no rights whatsoever and were the first to be executed. These positions would also determine ones place in the distribution of food as well as the amount received (Ebihara 1987:25).

The DK regime ushered in a new era beginning with 'Year Zero'. Monks and intellectuals were killed (even those returning from abroad to help the regime) while the temples and the educational system traditionally stored therein were destroyed. Urbanites or those having knowledge beyond the basics needed for life in rural society were dubbed 'New People' and placed under control of the 'Base People' who were prized for their ignorance. 'School' at best was basic literacy and arithmetic but in reality was a stream of Communist propaganda, songs, and slogans. An informant who grew up during the 1970s related that what he remembered about 'school' included films about communism from China and occasional speeches espousing its virtues. The expansion of knowledge, so pushed for during Sihanouk's reign, however ad hoc, and the quick transfer to a mobilised society under Lon Nol, were precursors to the end as

the past was rolled over by modernity. The demise of education in Cambodia was not a surprise or an anomaly but a steady trend whereby a rural, tradition bound country was pushed too far too fast over the course of decades.

By the early 1970s the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) with Sihanouk as its figurehead won large support throughout the countryside by those still loyal to their monarch. Indeed, it is arguable whether the Khmer Communists could have secured such support in its initial stages without him. The CPK's motivation was to overthrow that social hierarchy so entrenched within Khmer culture, yet to preach that line publicly would have potentially alienated those in the countryside it was slowly 'liberating'. Education in these areas varied according to local cadre in charge and their dedication to the Communist cause. The Eastern Zone, as they were later to be called, saw looser restrictions compared to the Southwestern Zone where Communist support was great and reflected the more 'typical' policies of the Centre Zone located in the greater Phnom Penh region (Kiernan 1997 [1996]:122).

In the southwestern town of Kampot, a US State Department airgram from 1974 noted that the destruction of most of the schools built before 1970 had already occurred (Quinn in Kiernan 1985:65). The use of Sihanouk as the Communists' front man was their key to attaining absolute power and in essence they had to use the system they would eventually destroy. However, they would never fully destroy it since their vision of strict egalitarianism would mean that the Marxist inspired leaders -- who believed themselves to be the only ones capable of ruling over an uneducated peasantry -- would have to maintain absolute power (Ayers 2000:85). That reliance on power and its acquisition so replete throughout Khmer history had to be maintained even if its

continued existence was denied by the CPK.

The DK regime under Pol Pot's leadership resided on a few key determinants. The first was to do away with the colonial modelled system that placed far too many students in a place where their ambitions were road blocked by the realities of the economy. This decision, while needed, was implemented in a haphazard and ruinous way that varied from region to region. Some zones had fewer disciplinary regulations while others fitted the typical Khmer Rouge stereotype. The other was gaining absolute control over those middlemen or gatekeepers who dealt with the masses on a daily basis. Given that the plan was to overturn society one logically could not trust those in positions of influence, the intelligentsia, who could pose their own logical arguments against radical change. This included the monkhood whose members straddled two potentially 'subversive' categories: education and religion.

Relying on relatively uneducated rural masses to be in control meant indoctrinating them with an ideology that stressed their inherently better status via their occupation and ties to the earth over those soiled by the city. This appeal to identity contained a racial component to engender a communion with similar peoples who made up the majority in a country whose economy was dominated by urban, non-ethnic Khmers as well as historic enemies migrating or occupying parts of the country (Ayers 2000:118-119). In the end, the regime's Centre Zone relied upon their own sense of a 'right to rule' thus continuing a social hierarchy they sought to destroy while maintaining all the trappings of traditional Khmer political power. The concept of Angkar as a thing and not a person or group came to dominate the identity of it and for many came to serve as an almighty deity who retained total control over life and death

(Hinton 2002:68-69).

After the rise of the Khmer Rouge the importance of trumping all other rival beliefs became critical. The creation of the image of Buddhism as the vehicle of oppression was a cornerstone of this plan. The objective of the Khmer Rouge may have been to dismantle subversive beliefs but to overturn everyday practices that engaged the supernatural would be almost impossible. Angkar was the new 'religion' responsible for life and death and would replace Buddhism while adopting many aspects of it. Notions of 'purity' and 'coherence' reflected the Theravada Buddhism cosmos as it continually progressed through cycles of coherence and fragmentation (Hinton 2002:71).

Just as Asoka mixed religion with economics and political patronage in India (Pryor 1991:22), in the mid nineteenth century King Ang Duang ascended the Khmer throne under Thai patronage and legitimised his rule by restoring the historic capital of Udong north of Phnom Penh as his centre of power. Once conferred with titles associated with Siva and Vishnu, he went on to reorder the Khmer microcosm, re-imposing norms of etiquette and restoring a chaotic society in accordance with the *dhamma* (ibid 75-76). The DK regime took this purification to a higher level in its reorganisation of society with Angkar as the new apex. While Mt. Meru was the centre of the Hindu-Buddhist universe, so to Angkar became the centre of the country. The first five Buddhist precepts adhered to by the faithful -- do not lie, kill, steal, drink, or have improper sexual relations -- were also espoused within the Khmer Rouge. Indeed, the notion of purification and the fragmentation of society into the new and old perpetuated their idea of a coherent state free of foreign (particularly Western) involvement and impurity. The well known saying, "To keep you is no gain, to kill you is no loss" denied

'New People' their identity and they, along with all things foreign to the regime, were easily disposed of.

Social roles and adherence to the duties therein are also found within the *dhamma*. Within these duties we can posit a correlate with the *dhamma* and what Geertz calls the "cosmic doctrine of duty" found in the universe (1983:196). This 'cosmic' doctrine states that every sort of individual (human, transhuman, infrahuman, etc.) has an ethic to fulfil and a nature to express, both being one in the same: "Snakes bite, demons deceive, gods give, sages control their senses . . . thieves steal . . . warriors kill . . . priests sacrifice . . . sons obey mothers," (O'Flaherty in Geertz 1983:196). The Khmer Rouge *dhamma* required individuals to fulfil their duty to ensure a coherent and pure state. As the Centre Zone issued commands that were not to be opposed, it also required individuals to obey without question. And similar to Buddhism allowing for the legitimate use of force by the king in defending the *dhamma* (Thion 1990 [1987]), Angkar appropriated the legitimate use of force against enemies of its *dhamma* and threats to social order.

The disruption of stable models of the *dhamma* forced individuals to reconcile this dissonance with their concept of identity, or 'self'. This psycho-social dissonance occurs when emotionally salient cultural models of the context-dependent self conflicts with other emotionally salient cultural models that violate that "context-dependent self-concept" (Hinton 2002 http://www.dccam.org/Tribunal/Analysis/Agents_Death.htm, accessed 12 July 2005). Even though the reduction of psycho-social dissonance is experienced by the individual, the DK regime played upon historic cultural models extolling virtues expressed in Cambodian folk-tales of distinguishing oneself through

bravely fighting socio-political enemies (ibid). Hyper-extending new models of the *dhamma* yet playing on 'traditional' duties -- the justification for killing enemies of the social order -- became the hallmark of this new 'religion'. A precept against killing was thus inverted and rationalised as fulfilling one's cosmic duty as defined by Angkar.

Those at the top of the Khmer Rouge hierarchy would be the overseers of this system of a continual decline of society and reinforcing the belief that enemies are without and within, possibly even in one's own family. The forced extraction of children from their families and the spying on family members by children to report to their new parent, Angkar, fostered distrust that continued past the DK regime's demise. This new parent was to be the sole educator of its children in order to perpetuate its existence.

Within less than one hundred years, education in Cambodia went from rural temple schools training mostly boys to become monks to a half-hearted public privatisation and 'reformed' temple system by a colonial power. Independence and breakneck expansion with little planning for future graduates resulted in a desire for egalitarian reform by those students sent abroad and now armed with newfound revolutionary knowledge. Hard-line crackdowns on these burgeoning dissidents (many of whom became teachers) by a regime that created them helped inspire an insurgent Communist movement directed by returnees to overthrow the entrenched corrupt system. With that overthrow Khmer identity became subsumed within the larger state, upending traditional notions of status and authority. The Khmer Rouge victory culminated with those same revolutionary ideals destroying a way of life known for centuries, along with up to one-third of the population.

The Education Gap and the Transfer of History and Tradition

What makes the tactics of the Khmer Rouge so ironic in regard to targeting the educated classes and their desire to get back to the 'real' Khmers was the fact that the top brass were from the intelligentsia. Khieu Samphan's (the DK head of state) doctoral thesis in economics was the general blueprint to put the regime on the road to economic liberation. Ieng Sary (Brother Number Two) still boasts of how he was considered the cleverest student during his university days in Paris outsmarting his fellow pupils. And Pol Pot was not only linked to the Royal Court but had attended a well-established French Lycée in Phnom Penh earning a scholarship and degree from France as well. These men and other future Khmer revolutionaries delved deep into Marxist theory while abroad formulating the foundation of their new utopia. As with other top cadre, these three men were all very intelligent and highly educated. Yet, all of these former schoolteachers were exactly the kind of people the DK regime viewed as roadblocks to their cause and purposely set out to destroy once they came to power.

After Vietnam's invasion, the education sector had to be restarted quickly. A Teacher Training College was reopened in 1980 with Vietnamese aid followed a year later by a Foreign Language Institute initially training students to become Vietnamese and Russian teachers (they combined in 1988 to form Phnom Penh University). Over the next decade schools focused on teaching 'Political Morality' and traditional folk tales (Kiernan 2004:17). While Vietnamese education advisors planned a new history syllabus, the new government did little to advance the education system going so far as to ban a 584 page history book, in Khmer, provided by the former USSR. As Cambodia found itself in the middle of a regional and superpower tug-of-war between the US,

USSR, China, and Vietnam, the generation growing up would go without basic education regarding even the most recent events. Once again, the nation's history was to be determined by powers set upon relating a suitable historical past.

Graduates of the Teacher's College co-authored new history textbooks, texts for higher grades, as well as the 1986 USSR sponsored text originally withheld. The texts covered history (both Khmer and World History) but failed to address atrocities committed under the Khmer Rouge. The UN still recognized Democratic Kampuchea as the legitimate government while countries such as the US and China continued to push for sanctions on the Vietnamese installed PRK. Lacking access to adequate documentation of Khmer Rouge atrocities, students were left with a watered down version of their recent past. Kiernan quotes an official 1991 eleventh grade political education text, "During the Pol Pot regime, the Cambodian people lived in hopelessness, without meaning, and in constant fear; in addition they suffered every kind of oppression [by] those violent savage murderers, and were transformed into the slaves of that gang" (2004:17). A grade nine text from 2000 mentions the DK regime by name but does not give details:

> **Democratic Kampuchea**
>
> From April 25 to April 27, 1975, the Khmer Rouge leaders held a special general assembly in order to form a new Constitution and renamed the country 'Democratic Kampuchea'. A new government of the DK, led by Pol Pot, came into existence, following which the massacre of Khmer citizens began (Ministry of Education Youth and Sports 2000).

The issue of genocide by the Khmer Rouge during the DK regime is still glossed over. The Education Ministry published new textbooks in 2001 which covered the regime only to pull them from schools in 2003 after only one semester (Kiernan

2004:17). The text also fails to mention the US bombing campaign but does paint the "US-backed Khmer Republic" under Lon Nol in a positive light noting that the Republic was fighting against Communist forces that took so many of its own who fought "what they perceived to be U.S. imperialists and their allies" (Ministry of Education Youth and Sports 2001).

Describing the Lon Nol coup/regime and the eventual entrance of the Khmer Rouge into Phnom Penh and its reorganisation of the government the text concludes with, "Therefore, Democratic Kampuchea was a complete institution, which had government, national assembly, and constitution, but the average citizens became slaves of Angkar" (Ministry of Education Youth and Sports 2001). It was followed by, "This regime had more than three millions [sic] innocent people killed. Few were the families that escaped the wrath of Angkar and its genocidal acts. In short, the DK plunged the entire country into a real catastrophe in only three years, eight months, and twenty days"; "Under Pol Pot's regime Cambodia became hell. A significant number of Cambodian people were killed, starved and worked to death, and forced to live with inadequate medical care, clothing, and shelter. Even innocent babies were brutalized and killed" (ibid). The text then jumps ahead to the Vietnamese invasion which from the reading casts Vietnam in a supporting role to the resistance led by, Heng Samrin, and the newly established PRK government. It gives no mention as to their position in the new government only to describe them as its "backers". Instead, emphasis is on those Khmer leaders who were former members of the Khmer Issarek movement of the 1940s-50s who had studied in North Vietnam after the Geneva Conference of 1954 (ibid).

Despite the text's brief accounting of the DK regime and lack of real substance

as to its formation, members, and ideological foundations it is apparent it was a step towards evaluating the events of the period. The *Khmer National United Front for National Salvation* (KNUFNS) led by former Khmer Rouge Eastern Zone commander Heng Samrin and backed by the Vietnamese was made up, among others, of former Khmer Rouge escaping the routine purges of Pol Pot (such as current Prime Minister Hun Sen, former regimental leader in the Eastern Zone) (Etcheson 1984:193). After the Vietnamese and KNUFNS invaded Cambodia, overthrew the DK regime, and later established the PRK government there was still the question of legitimacy. However, legitimacy is a rather nebulous term; its shifting definition(s) is repackaged according to those employing it, and must be understood within the larger context of events occurring within the broader region.

When General Lon Nol's Khmer Republic was the West's ally in fighting Vietnamese Communists and the recipient of massive amounts of military aid, the issue of legitimacy was set aside as the US and its allies were engaged in the final years of their own war. While the USSR aided North Vietnam who helped train the Khmer Rouge which in turn received massive military assistance from China, Western powers depended on the Khmer Republic in their fight against the North Vietnamese. The success of post-DK Cambodia hinged upon outside powers vying for ideological dominance as well as retribution for the cost (either real or symbolic) that domination incurred. Legitimacy, therefore, was dependent upon the ability of the PRK government to remain in good standing with the majority of its people as it was engaged in an ongoing insurgency while maintaining a working relationship with larger powers, namely Vietnam, operating within the country.

The representation of the events leading up to, during, and after the DK regime highlights some of the broader issues regarding the participation of many high-ranking Khmer officials and prolonged delay of any Khmer Rouge trials. However, the representation of history and, indeed, the delays themselves are examples of the dichotomy in Khmer education -- one being government driven and the other temple driven. While little is presented in secular schools regarding past atrocities, monks are taught about the killings and Buddhism's destruction. Some know a little, others a good deal, but there is also the knowledge that creating too many issues with the current regime can affect their own livelihood. Removal from monastic service for those pursuing higher education via their role as monks or worse, the possibility of physical injury or death (see section 4.5 below) has a powerful silencing influence.

While changes in education are occurring such as the growth of numerous language schools cropping up around the country, knowledge of the years under the Khmer Rouge is often limited to personal and family histories and the general sense that something bad occurred. Thus, in many of my personal encounters with younger people I was often struck by the relative lack of knowledge and overall banality of people's personal views. This could be an example of survivors wanting to forget the past and not passing the stories on to their children or the fact that in a country that still suffers endemic violence with little official retribution, silence is often the only option. However, an inevitable question arises: how would an accurate presentation of the atrocities influence social relations when so many were forced to participate? There may never be an answer that satisfies all parties involved but a formal trial in the Khmer language can at least provide some remedy for the poor recount that has occurred thus

far.

* * * * *

Traditional Khmer education was historically retained within local nodes of knowledge in the form of the Buddhist monastery. The transfer of this knowledge was controlled by monks who also used their position for transmitting local ideologies: folk beliefs, local legends, regional folk deities, etc. Winning over the learned members of a local village validated the ambitions of those individuals or political entities seeking greater ideological gains within the rural Cambodian countryside. Historically, villages were in a sense 'islands' separated geographically and not prone to mass demographic shifts. This sense of community continued post-independence, binding villages together through overlapping social, political, religious, and social bonds (Ebihara 1968:215). Ideological and institutional shifts as well as the displacement of identity and power within the monastery and monastic community by French colonial administrators and Khmer politicians encountered resistance by monks who were threatened by the potential loss of status.

As will be seen in chapter four, the Khmer Rouge initially tapped into this latent resistance by projecting the image of 'true' Khmer identity and reaching out to monks as gatekeepers of those (relatively) isolated villages. Buddhism, therefore, was the initial inroad while the local *wat* was the medium for projecting Khmer Rouge ideology. Monks were historically the learned members of the community and their role as traditional educators influenced their respective *sanghas*, either positively or negatively, according to the level of power they held within the countryside (http://www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/DK_Policy/DK_Policy_Noun_Chea_Statement.htm, accessed 12

July 05).

Due to the breakneck speed with which the education sector was expanded prior to 1970, and the growing unlikelihood of viable employment afterwards, the monastery was an easy target as a symbol privilege. Monks, barred from work in the secular sense, depended on the wider society for support. Although General Lon Nol paradoxically used Buddhism as a rallying cry for attacks against the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge's dismantling of Khmer society required Buddhism's destruction. Given that societal roles were reversed and 'Base People' were given high status due to their low education, individuals and groups viewed as intellectuals posed a threat. Buddhist monks were the local intellectuals and in positions of influence in this overwhelmingly rural society and, therefore, needed to be eliminated (Kiernan 1997 [1996]:56-57).

The restoration of the order after the Vietnamese invasion required that a suitable history needed to be presented to demonise the Khmer Rouge (albeit curtly). While the newly installed PRK government was lionised, its upper echelons were made of many former Khmer Rouge cadres. This delicate balancing act between acknowledging the obvious genocide yet not indicting those in power also meant that the monastery's calculated re-establishment was steered in the direction desired by larger political powers. Through the planned establishment of the 'facts' of the DK regime, the current government ensures that younger generations will only be educated according to their idea of which facts are appropriate. Continued suppression of vocal monks through violence (infra) also marginalises their role as a quasi-political element. Restricting the monastery in this way may also inhibit others from voicing protests if they know that even those committed to non-violence can be targets for retribution.

The relationship between Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and to lesser extent the extinguished kingdom of Champa, often turned on their respective competing ideologies that connected them through religion, trade, and military dominance. From the early Hinduised kingdoms and their monumental architectural campaigns to the community of religious specialists who buttressed and legitimised the position of the king, the countries waxed and waned in power in the face of expanding Indic and later Islamic traditions. These traditions incorporated and, to an extent, were incorporated within the indigenous beliefs of the region. The impact of these local traditions and their influence on religious specialists further determined the relative power religious specialists enjoyed within royal spheres and the identity they would project upon peasants within the countryside (Vandergeest 1993:852).

At the same time, however, their relative power within local villages depended on their ability to act as local religious leaders for people living in socially and environmentally uncertain rural areas. Through cementing their own claims to power (both 'official' monks and 'unofficial' indigenous healers and fortune tellers), the identities religious specialists secured as local and royal promoters and brokers for the supernatural (Vandergeest 1993:852) maintained and expanded their influence within institutions of monarchical and later non-monarchical political authority. The course this influence would traverse changed over time while the physical space religious institutions occupied would come to resemble claims to power and identity and determine the actions taken against those claims by local and political authorities.

3. Religious Specialists

> *Some are highly estimable, some are not; some act from motives of pure spiritual devotion, others from motives of material opportunism. Some desire only to be loyal Cambodians or to conform to the traditions of their ancestors or to "pay their debt of recognition" to their parents. Others are motivated by a desire for education* (Steinberg 1959:65).

As the above quote demonstrates, historically many have chosen to enter the monastery specifically to attend school. My interviews with monks support this, but it is not surprising. The chance for a formal education has long been considered by many to be a legitimate reason for joining the monastery but only when cited alongside other reasons: gaining merit, learning the *dhamma*, etc. The rate of employment for males aged 15-24 is 68.1% (Than 2004), and this corresponds with the target age group normally entering the monastery. This age bracket is important as those unable to gain employment or who cannot or do not want to enter the monastery are left with little options as were disaffected males in similar positions immediately prior to 1975. What remains to be seen is the growth-rate of those entering the *wat* if the employment market continues at its current pace. Monastic service also stands in relation to the other factors of secular education, notably the corruption and cost of sending a child to school.

Entrance into the monastery has also at times been a form of escapism for some who are seeking either relief from the toils of rice farming or conscription into the armed services. It also serves as a quasi-orphanage for those parents who have given their child to the local *wat* due to financial constraints or to gain merit for the family and ancestors (my informants would normally cite financial determinants before merit). These young

boys are known as *Konsuh Loak* (‘monk’s pupil’) or more commonly as ‘temple boys’ and aside from helping with chores they also receive instruction from monks on proper etiquette and reciting the Pali sutras (Ebihara 1968:370). During Ebihara’s fieldwork in 1959-1960 she noted that two *wats* in her research area had nine and ten temple boys respectively (ibid). Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite with six to nine monks had two temple boys while the larger Wat Chum Kriel with over 200 monks had only three.

However, there are also wider factors at play when one chooses a monastic education over a secular one. Gaining greater knowledge of the *dhamma*, attaining merit, and becoming a ‘better Buddhist’ are certainly driving motivations for many. Yet, so too are others such as a rise in social status, the opportunity to attain other skills outside of the *wat* at little or no cost (several of the monks at Chum Kriel studied business and computing in Kampot town), and social networking[2]. Networking can include those within the country and the extended Khmer community abroad. Several monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel had sponsors living in the US and Australia introduced to them by other monks. The money and gifts donated by them provided for an extended transnational merit-network. This network provides a means for Khmers living abroad to make merit within their former home which benefits the local *wat* and wider community through providing funds and material goods for monks and larger construction projects within the *wat* (improvements on the *vihara* or new residences, for example).

Improving the *wat* not only provides merit but it also raises the *wat’s* status and

2 The *Dhamayut* order is also the order which former and current Kings Sihanouk and Sihamoni belonged to as well as political lawmaker Sam Rainsy.

that of the *sangha* and monks serving within it while providing individuals with a chance to reconnect with their village and resolve some of the issues they have to contend with living far from their homeland (for a similar discussion on merit-making activities by migrant workers in Thailand, see Mills 1997:51). Well known *wats* also attract outside patrons for festivals such as *Katun* when individuals or groups can put on their own ceremonies which create merit and provide gifts such as new robes for monks (see section 6.1.4). Although networking for either social or religious reasons may not be the primary motivation for some, others do indeed realise the potential it offers particularly in gaining a sponsor abroad. Attending university for many within the countryside is not a realistic option without some type of support. Indeed, in many ways it reflects similar attitudes to the afterlife; most Khmers do not necessarily expect to reach *nibbana* in this life but merely hope for a better existence in the next. So too, most Khmers are realistic about the potential for further study and understand that they more than likely will not reach the university level without at least moving to the capital.

Yet, given the demand for labour for farming and the need for wider social nets that can be relied upon in case of illness or other misfortune, relocating to the capital will probably not occur unless other siblings could take on additional duties. Monastic education for many young men does provide a viable alternative to secular education in that it is less costly, there are fewer applicants (the number vying for a place is less and only involves males), and can lead to other opportunities within the capital where the Preah Sihanouk Raj Buddhist University is located. Although many understand that attending further study within the monastery can lead to a ‘good job’, that does not detract from the realisation that their service also creates merit and benefits members of

the *sangha* and other villagers dependent on the local monastery for the various roles it fills (see section 5.2 for a discussion of those roles).

There are four different types of Buddhist schools in Cambodia: Buddhist precept schools, primary schools, high schools, and the Buddhist university in Phnom Penh (Sen 2000). Precept schools serve young student-monks before entrance into primary education and are broken down into first, second, and third classes. Primary school begins officially at age fifteen for novice monks and lasts approximately three years while secondary schooling lasts four (however, the youngest novice monk at Chum Kriel's primary school was ten). According to Om Khem, director of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's Buddhist education system reflects that of other Theravada Buddhist nations such as Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka (in http://www.hbfasia.org/southeastasia/thailand/projects/bud_inst.htm, accessed 02 Feb. 05). However, whether it can be truly seen as equal is suspect given the loss of knowledge both in terms of people and materials. The segment of the population that is under consideration involves males, of course, since females cannot enter the monastery. Primary schools located within *wats* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite are open to both sexes but Buddhist secondary education is strictly for males who are already monks. The following discussion details the daily activities of monks, the fundamentals of the monkhood, and the role of the Buddhist education system in the lives of those serving in *wats*.

Daily Life within the Monastery

The everyday life of a monk is one of the obvious symbols of the countryside. Seasonal cycles may come and go and the annual rains may fall but the life of a peasant farmer is by and large dependent on nature. The monastery, however, is a constant that is intertwined with nature marking auspicious days in the Khmer calendar and thus the rhythm of the countryside. A monk's schedule continues day after day only to be interrupted by the needs of the villagers or the next upcoming festival. Their day normally begins at 4:30am with the sounding of a gong or bell often found in the *salaa* calling the monks to prayer which usually lasts for one hour. The abbot normally starts the prayers when he is present but the choice of which *dhamma* to pray depends on the monks. Some prayers may be chosen over others out of taste or knowledge. If monks have not yet memorised a certain prayer they will stay quiet until a prayer they do know begins.

The melodic monotone chants can be heard at a distance in a countryside devoid of cars, televisions, and other background interference and reverberates quite eerily to the foreign ear across a still and darkened landscape. After an hour (or maybe less depending on the monks' motivation) the monks retreat to their quarters to prepare for the day. A normal day depends on the *wat* and its location. Large *wats* invariably have activity going on for seemingly all but several hours at night. Villagers visit and friends stop by to exchange pleasantries while monks 'hang out' seeing the comings and goings of the *wat*. Smaller *wats* are noticeably less busy as life revolves more around the local (and elderly) members of the *sangha* coming in to pass the time with each other or with the abbot. However, they do have an enjoyable level of chaos given that *wats* often have

a primary school attached to them. The intervals of classes and breaks see local children spilling out onto the grounds climbing over anything in sight and running amok to as much of an extent as can be done in a Buddhist *wat*. Because most monks are from the area they often know many of the children and, since much closer in age than the other regular members of the *sangha*, take on a 'big brother' role towards them.

Around 7:00am the monks return to the *salaa* for breakfast, an event looked forward to by many given the restrictions on food consumption. After breakfast they head back again to their quarters to pursue whatever activities they have planned. The role of monks as teachers varies according to the *wat* as well. At Kompong Dtrou Lite none of the monks taught in the primary school as has traditionally been their role, however, at Chum Kriel some conducted classes for their fellow monks if they were particularly well versed in a subject.

Aside from their disposition as elder siblings, Kompong Dtrou Lite was similar to other rural *wats* as the small cadre of monks took care of daily chores and studied the *dhamma* or other subjects if attending the secondary school at Wat Chum Kriel. Chum Kriel, on the other hand, was the seat of the only Buddhist secondary school in Kampot province and monks followed a regimented routine revolving around it. Their schedule required a good deal of study and not as much time could be devoted to learning the Pali sutras independently although it was included within the curriculum. The memorisation of the sutras was always noted as one of the thorns in the sides of young monks given the difficulty in learning long stanzas in a foreign language. Yet, monks did not always spend their time sequestered within their quarters and in fact often spent a lot of time socialising with one another or other visitors. This was particularly true in the case of a

special event (religious or otherwise) at the *wat*. Even if not involving them they would nonetheless stay back and watch the various people coming in and out or talking with their non-monk friends in attendance.

Monks also must conduct their daily rounds collecting alms from their respective routes. The routine varies but generally monks establish individual routes among themselves. Some may go to the same house everyday while others may decide to mix it up depending on the homes they patronise. If a monk leaves a *wat* for whatever reason -- either leaving the monastery or for school -- they hand over their route to somebody else. The abbot does not decree who goes where and instead it is often based on seniority. Most tend to take over routes of their seniors thus continuing a local hierarchy even if unknowingly. They often go out in their finer robes (as opposed to their everyday ones they wear about the *wat*) along with bowls for collecting alms at staggered times shortly after breakfast. Donations are not expected nor often given by some villagers. I have been to homes where monks are literally shooed away (sometimes for fear that they are impersonators if their dress is not quite right) while others may give a small amount or apologise explaining that they cannot give on that particular day. Women generally donate more and more often than men due to their position within the home and family as primary coordinators of religious activities, and on the whole are more observant of religious customs than their male partners.

The second and final meal for monks comes at 11:00am. This normally is attended by the older, regular members of the *sangha* who bring food already prepared or prepare it there within the *wat*. *Don-chis* usually handle the food preparation while directing temple-boys in their chores. The monks generally lounge about in their

quarters beforehand waiting to eat and some can be seen milling about holding their bowl and utensils in anticipation. It is a very everyday affair without undue ritual. Children run in and outside the *vihara* while other villagers stop by to collect water or just pass through. At the sound of the bell the monks meander over to the *salaa* talking and joking along the way, giving the *wat* more of a boarding school feel than a Buddhist temple. Prior to eating the abbot begins the chanting of the sutras with the lead switching between the more knowledgeable monks. The chanting goes back and forth between them for about ten minutes as some take a breath or wait until prayers they know begin. The melodic sound emanating from the *salaa* over the temple grounds can be heard for quite a distance as it varies in pitch, speed, and duration.

Some monks do not participate either because they are out of town visiting other *wats* or staying in their dorms. On special holy days after the prayers the *achar* (lay monk) reads off the names and donations of those present. Those in attendance can expect to receive merit for their visit and preparation of the meal while it also provides them with a chance to socialise and talk about upcoming events within the *wat*. Generally those in attendance for lunch during the week at both Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel normally did not include young people unless they were there for a specific reason. People may come in and out of the *salaa* to speak with others (even during the *dhamma*) and this is not necessarily taken as an offence as long as it is done discreetly.

After lunch the monks return to their respective duties. Some go to school, others to their quarters to study, some clean the temple grounds or perfom simple labour, while still more may socialise or travel outside for an errand or to conduct a service as

requested by a local villager. While manual labour is prohibited, monks can be seen doing simple carpentry, carrying buckets of water from a cistern, and other chores. The concept of labour shifts according to context; while digging a trench with a hoe may not be done in some instances, when lay members are not available to help out, monks take it upon themselves if it is a real necessity. Labour, however, is also defined differently according to location and tradition. Wandering forest monks of Thailand conduct heavy manual labour on a fairly regular basis and even regard it as part of their regional tradition (Tiyavanich 1997:275). The rest of the day generally follows the same pattern until 5:30 pm when the gong or bell sounds again summoning the monks to the *salaa* for their evening prayers for one hour more. This recitation is similar to previous ones and is attended by those monks who are willing to participate (most participate in smaller *wats* as opposed to larger ones that can afford to have many absent).

The rest of the evening is spent generally within their quarters or outside conversing with others or finishing whatever duties are still required. Towards the end of the day the monks take care of their personal hygiene. As Kompong Dtrou Lite had a cistern within its bathroom the monks could take care of it individually as opposed to Chum Kriel where the file of monks heading off to the nearby pond was often accompanied by playful jostling as some jokingly attempted to push one another into the water. As night falls fast and on time in the tropics there is little left to do afterwards but study and talk. Silence hastens rest in the countryside and with little left to do the *wat* and its surroundings quickly grow silent. The benefit of electricity at some *wats* (such as Chum Kriel) allows monks to spend a little more time for themselves arranging their next day's tasks, cutting firewood for breakfast the next morning, or continuing their

studies if behind. By 11:00 pm most are asleep to wake up in a few hours and start the cycle again.

Fundamentals of the Monkhood

As noted, there are two Theravada Buddhist sects in Cambodia: the *Mahanikaya* and *Dhamayut* orders, the latter being smaller and considered the stricter of the two. Originally developed in Thailand in the nineteenth century, it has historically been the order favoured by the royal court (Steinberg 1959:255). Both King Sihanouk and his son and current monarch, King Sihamoni, were monks within the order albeit briefly. Ebihara noted that *Dhamayut* monks would often look down upon *Mahanikaya* monks for not taking their duties seriously (1968:375). My informants related similar information. There have been known to be doctrinal conflicts between the two as members of the former have been known to ridicule the larger *Mahanikaya* sect for its looser adherence to the scriptures and more 'liberal' attitude. Monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel also noted that they could not stay overnight at a *Dhamayut wat* but only visit for a day. They also spoke of the sect with slight agitation and a feeling of being unwanted when going to *Dhamayut wats*.

The main difference in appearance between them is seen in their robes and the way in which they carry their alms bowls; *Mahanikaya* monks use a sling while *Dhamayut* monks do not. *Dhamayut* monks also do not pronounce the Pali sutras with a Khmer accent, cannot accept things from the hands of women or carry money, must be accompanied by another male wherever they go, and cannot attend the cinema or theatre (Ebihara 1968:379). While the *Mahanikaya* sect greatly outnumbers the *Dhamayut*,

entrance into either order depends more on one's location than personal preference; if one's local *wat* happens to be *Dhamayut* then that is the order one will enter into. Further, *Mahanikaya wats* are ubiquitous throughout the countryside (Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel were *Mahanikaya*) while *Dhamayut wats* have historically been concentrated in urban centres (Fitzsimmons 1957:299).

However, as the sect has also been the favourite of royalty and current and former kings as well as high-ranking politicians (Kings Sihanouk, Sihamoni, and politicians such as Prince Ranariddh, and opposition leader, Sam Rainsy) it has often been cited as the sect of 'elites' (Fitzsimmons 1957:299). Each sect's hierarchy is composed of eleven respective levels, the first seven known as *thananukram* and the upper four as *rajagana*. The *Mahanikaya* sect has 35 monks within the *rajagana* while the *Dhamayut* has 21. Both sects require these monks to have served at least 20 years before being named to this level (http://countrystudies.us/cambodia/2.htm, accessed 01 Dec 04).

By the late 1950s there were over 2,500 *Mahanikaya* and fewer than 150 *Dhamayut wats* (Fitzsimmons 1957:299) with tens-of-thousands of monks, the vast majority belonging to the former order. In the late 1960s the number of *wats* increased to over 3,300 along with more than 65,000 monks but by 1979 the vast majority of *wats* were dismantled or destroyed (numbers are unavailable) with only twelve monks surviving after liberation (Center of Advance Study and Ministry of Cult and Religious Affairs 1996). In a report to parliament in 2000, Prime Minister Hun Sen stated that the number of *wats* throughout the country stood at 3,685; 3,588 *Mahanikaya wats* and 97 *Dhamayut wats* along with 50,081 monks; 49,097 and 984 respectively (Hun 2000).

Although the monastery has been struggling back an economic question is raised when discussing the difference between the two orders. A monastic order requiring burdens beyond those accepted by a community dominated by agriculture may not be patronised as much as one whose monks are allowed relatively more freedom. Before deciding to become a monk an individual should study the *dhamma* for approximately two months. Although not necessarily a great amount, the amount of work and effort one is willing to expend on monastic duties (before or after entrance) would likely weed out overly strict sects especially when agricultural duties or family obligations occupy their normal lives. This coupled with the fact that the *Dhamayut* order is so limited in number and location (urban centres) ensures that *Dhamayut wats* and monks will continue to be far outnumbered in relation to those of *Mahanikaya*.

As noted, entering the monastery is relatively easy. If a male wants to become a monk he must first go to the temple and inform the abbot of his decision. The abbot determines on what day to enter but normally five days after expressing his wish to join, a lunch and ceremony will be held at the entrant's home before he goes to the temple that evening. Often a family may hold a celebration before the day of entrance into the *wat* as well (one informant related the story of the party held for him the night before complete with an elaborate meal and plenty of alcohol where he ended up getting intoxicated). The day he is to enter the monastery the initiate's head is shaved at his home before he is brought by his parents to the temple to receive his new robes.

If entering the *wat* as a child one begins one's monastic journey as a '*naan*', a novice generally from eleven years old until one's ordination. This occurs at 21 and requires three months worth of prior training before becoming a '*Preah Khun*' or

ordained monk. Monks are to gain wisdom similar to that which put the Buddha on the path towards enlightenment or at least the knowledge of how it may be attained. Although the use of magic is currently forbidden they were said to be used by the historical Buddha to overthrow false Indian shamans in the past. One must learn 30 rules and the ten precepts and continue to learn all 227 rules as laid out in the *Vinaya*. The abbot must be a *Preah Khun* and his authority stretches over the entire *wat*. Administratively the *wat* is served by the *sangha*, the *achar* most notably, while the other lay monks and *don-chis* see to the organization of festivals and tend to other duties.

As monks are separated from a village or commune, yet separated to fulfil a working role providing for their spiritual support, the smooth running of any *wat* would be hindered by the absence of an active laity. Competent monks who respect their monastic regulations are believed to have more respect within society and, therefore, benefit society in general by providing models of upright behaviour. An upright monastery also provides increased status for a community which may further benefit from an increased attendance at *wats* during various festivals throughout the year (For a detailed discussion of ideal behaviour in Theravada Buddhism, see Swearer 1995:8).

As noted, young men enter the monastery for different reasons including financial and/or family circumstances, for education or lack of work, and for a chance to make merit for themselves and family. While most if not all monks will cite the latter, most also admit that some join for purely personal gains unrelated to being a monk. Many who were entered into the monastery by their family as temple boys may become monks later on although it is neither a prerequisite for becoming a monk nor necessarily

an advantage aside from already knowing some of the sutras and rules. Education is a big part for some especially if they are ambitious enough to desire further schooling (as many do). And while not stated directly, the opportunity to avoid a laborious life toiling in rice fields does provide certain incentives. These are not new phenomena and should not be seen as a result of the Khmer Rouge experience -- past research has demonstrated similar effects prior to 1970 (Ebihara 1968; Steinberg 1959; Fitzsimmons 1957). Entrance into the monastery is also not restricted to the young. My informants pointed out that many young men become monks after university to give 'thanks' as well when the job market is scarce; "Same as Thai" as one monk put it.

The change between pre and post-1975 has altered the role of service within the monastery as a given for rural young men. Many bypass service even when it is requested by their parents, opting for secular work. The persistent need for soldiers throughout the 1980s-90s also meant that for many young men there was opportunity to serve within the military and a chance to escape the poverty and social constraints (customary and political) of the countryside. Serving in the military was by far more dangerous given the lack of training, equipment, and persistence of landmines still littered throughout the countryside. The lack of control or power on the local level could be alleviated through service as an individual changed from a farmer armed only with a hoe to a soldier armed with a rifle. The prospect for abuse was often perpetuated as people who were oppressed were now in positions of relative influence as had been the case under the Khmer Rouge.

This situation has unfortunately continued as the size of the army (much of which is made up of 'ghost' units) and the ratio of high ranking officers to enlisted men

has siphoned off tremendous amounts of foreign humanitarian aid (Hoak and Zepp 2003). It has also led to the running of scores of illegal ventures -- mining and illegal logging being the most prominent -- as provincial military commanders can control trade and travel within an area (ibid). Some of the more insidious activities particularly in the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin in the northwest of the country include the running of illegal casinos and brothels as well as human trafficking operations; Pailin is often referred to as the Khmer Rouge 'fiefdom' as former commanders still enjoy almost complete control over the area.

Three of my informants were former soldiers originally from Kampot province and still lived within the area. They were in their late twenties to early thirties and their recollections of joining the military were all identical; there was no work to be had and no opportunities on the horizon. Although they did not know each other beforehand they volunteered for the army in the early 1990s and were sent to the northwest province of Battambang to receive training. Recounting the period, they noted that there was still a good deal of fighting in Kampot province with its numerous mountain chains acting as a base for Khmer Rouge operations. After being shipped to Battambang, they were given a uniform, a rifle, and ammunition and were "put in the forest" to fight in the mountains to the north of Kampot town near Mt. Bokor, one of the tallest mountains in the country. After serving and fighting for many years and seeing many members of their unit killed or maimed, they decided to leave and return to their homes.

The fact that I was interested in the monastery was amusing to them and they would smile and shake their heads whenever they saw me going to and from *wats*. Buddhism was unimportant for them as was its practice (Sim, 31, one time asked me to

write down the story of the Buddha for him to explain to a foreigner at a local NGO). For them, service within the monastery was a waste of time and provided no opportunity. That said, Jo, 32, did have a younger brother who was a monk and was widely regarded as a very intelligent individual, something Jo attributed to his service and study in the monastery. When I asked Jo if he would ever become a monk he replied nonchalantly, "Never thought about it."

While Buddhism was not important for them, they all recognised that *neak ta* was important for soldiers and would describe the makeshift shrines many would build to protect themselves from harm. They also recognised the importance of Buddhism for older generations. Jo acknowledged that his mother did receive merit from his younger brother's service in the monastery (although he never claimed to receive any himself) and all three accepted that the *wat* was important for social interaction. Dan, 29, often went to *wats* on Buddhist holidays yet only to meet members of the opposite sex and not for religious purposes. In this manner he was not that different from other young people, the main difference being the mental separation the *wat* and monkhood held for people similar to him as opposed to those who did not fight during the war.

For many in his position there was a certain level of ineffectualness to the monastery as it proved to be powerless against the Communist onslaught. What importance it did hold centred on the psychological; Dan related that if he were to die his mother would put on a traditional funeral for him and have his body cremated within the *wat*, however, this was for *her* to cope with *his* death. While all three were resolute in saying they did not believe in any type of religion, they were not averse to reincarnation if it were to occur. However, their actions in the past seemed to weigh

upon them and their prospects for a better life in general. While they fought against the Khmer Rouge (a seemingly meritorious act), they still had experienced and done things that made their outlook somewhat fatalistic. Although they did not go into detail about their and other's experiences during those times, it does represent the other side of the monastery's revival. For some, it became a refuge, acting as a coping mechanism for so much loss. For others, the monastery was of no use outside of purely social matters and was better left for those who needed it.

Rules and Observances

Laymen are expected to follow the precepts laid out by the Eightfold Path: one must conduct the right, 1) understanding, 2) thought, 3) speech, 4) action (do not lie, steal, kill, or commit sexual misconduct), 5) livelihood, 6) effort, 7) mindfulness, and 8) concentration. For monks there are ten precepts: do not, 1) harm living things (even plants), 2) steal, 3) lie or use improper speech, 4) engage in sexual misconduct, 5) ingest intoxicating substances, 6) eat after noon, 7) wear perfumes or personal adornments, 8) participate in acts such as dancing, singing, or the theatre, 9) handle money or gold, or 10) sit or sleep on an elevated platform. The first five technically apply to all Buddhists, six through eight may be observed during festivals, and the remaining are reserved for those in the monastery as well as *achars* and *don-chis*. On top of this there are 227 monastic rules (311 for *don-chis*) called the *Patimok* or the 'Code of Errors' within the *Vinaya* including a prohibition against being alone in a room with a woman or travelling by themselves (Ebihara 1968:374).

Given Cambodia's recent history, breaking the first five precepts for the laity and

the perceived immorality of such conduct has undergone quite a change to say the least. Readings from pre-1970 often perpetuate the idea of a 'gentle land' and its docile and gentle people:

> Cambodians feel that the individual should be continually attuned to the Buddhist code of personal conduct. A high value is placed on proper standards of sexual behavior and on premarital chastity and marital fidelity. Non-violence is another important precept, and crimes of violence such as assault, murder, and rape actually are rare in Cambodia. Temperance, diligence, thrift, and self-discipline are stressed. Children are taught to despise lying as being incompatible with their natural pride and Buddhist precepts, but "social lying" as a means to avoid embarrassment to oneself or to others is considered a different matter (Steinberg 1959:277).

This assessment and others of the Khmer character before 1970 often gloss over the intricacies that have played out within Khmer culture particularly with regard to conceptions of power and identity. While it is easy in retrospect to look at picturesque versions of the Khmer psyche, history has shown that while the local *wat* has provided stability and a sense of cohesion within society, rifts often develop and can be pursued to lethal ends as with any other people. Perhaps the events of the 1970s have acted as a generational benchmark for many Khmers. During my fieldwork I often received two contrasting views of Cambodia's history: older generations often conjured up images of a gentle people while younger generations (those too young to remember the Khmer Rouge) often focused on more recent events and specifically one name -- Pol Pot. It would seem safe to say that the differences before and after the war in terms of morality are fairly stark. That said, the breaking of social norms was just as common in the past; it has been noted in Mahayana, Theravada, or Vajarayana (Tantric Buddhism of Nepal and Tibet) Buddhist countries that the first four above precepts are generally followed while the fifth (avoiding intoxicating substances) is often not (see also Harvey 2000:79, Obeyesekere 1968:27, and Lewis 1996:245). Steinberg even notes that in 1959 rice

alcohol was one of the country's chief exports (1959:214).

From my findings this view has remained fairly consistent. Although alcohol may be consumed more than before, particularly at weddings or other social events outside of the *wat*, alcohol consumption as viewed by the monastery is a 'sin' that breaks one of their core precepts. Even so, it can be used in small amounts for medicinal purposes. Lay attitudes to its use are somewhat ambiguous. Although it does break a precept its widespread use by Khmers (and Muslim Chams) is accepted as part of society. This view may also have been skewed given the experiences suffered by so many. During the Khmer New Year I was visiting Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and speaking with, Jon, 44, a member of the *sangha* and previously a monk for several years (and also a former *achar* at the *wat*) about the symbolism behind the celebration. During our conversation an elderly, and extremely drunk, man walked into the *wat*, saw the two of us talking and came over to listen. While Jon spoke fluent English the elderly man did not speak but merely sat and watched the sight of a foreigner hastily scribbling down the meaning behind that year's 'animal' (it was the Year of the Monkey). After a while the elderly man grew tired of watching us and sauntered off to speak with the abbot. Jon told me that he never went to the *wat* except on holidays and when he did he was always very intoxicated.

The man lost his wife and children to the Khmer Rouge and used alcohol as a coping mechanism during popular festivals. Jon went on to note that, "As long as you don't drink in the *wat*, it's okay." Neither the abbot nor the rest of the *sangha* chastised the man for the condition he was in. The experience he and others underwent elicits empathy on the part of many (who more than likely had similar experiences) and an

understanding that it was really not their place to scold a man (or perhaps any individual) who had lost so much. The younger monks followed suit and when I asked them about the incident many responded that the man had "many problems" but there was no speaking ill of his actions.

For monks, following the precepts varied according to age and experience. Ebihara noted that some of the biggest infractions such as fornication require defrocking while lesser offences such as impatience would bring a loss of face in the eyes of their fellow monks (1968:374-375). In this regard the monkhood has changed from her description. There are still incidents of monks having affairs, however, this is alongside more serious crimes such as rape, murder, and suicide. The former still carries the penalty of defrocking and the latter three are of course serious crimes particularly if they are carried out by monks.

Young monks can often be seen smoking cigarettes and some do on occasion get in trouble for drinking and fighting. As far as the precepts are concerned, monks do sleep on raised beds as laymen would and do indulge in other pastimes such as listening to music and radio programs. Music is a large part of any festival and traditional games played within the *wat's* grounds are allowed since the monks do not participate but merely watch. While books are a popular form of entertainment, so too are cassette players and monks enjoy listening to the popular Khmer, Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese entertainers as do other young people their age. At Chum Kriel vendors selling music cassettes stopped by now and then and monks did purchase them when they could afford to do so.

When monks do run afoul of some of the other precepts they may confess to a

fellow monk as they normally do twice a month. Many times during my stay I would hear monks curse and the use of '*choy mai-ai*' ('one who fornicates with another's mother'), although not routine, did not come as a surprise when I heard it. Young monks often spoke to one another in everyday terms and generally did not use the special forms of address employed for the monastery. They would say '*ch'goo-ut*' ('crazy') or '*laot*' ('stupid') in jest about one another and others as well as older members of the *sangha* out of earshot. They would also play-fight with each other or their non-monk friends which to the outsider can appear a little strange. The sight of young monks in saffron robes pretending to fight in front of a Buddhist temple is not the first thing that usually comes to mind.

An incident at Wat Chum Kriel provides a good example of many of these things as well as exchanges between the *wat* and secular world. In mid-July at a visit to Chum Kriel I was sitting outside the residence of one of the monks speaking with several informants when an ambulance pulled up into the courtyard. It was *T'ngai Seul* (the Buddhist Sabbath) and a Sunday so the monks did not have school. Three men exited the vehicle and were met by the abbot who began to speak with them. "They built the new house" one informant said motioning to the abbot's residence close by. At this time many monks began to congregate around their balconies and porches trying to see what would transpire although they already knew.

The men were collecting their payment for the new construction project but were also there collecting blood. When the monks began to talk about the obvious reason for their trip and the apprehension of giving blood in the middle of the courtyard from a dilapidated ambulance they began to slowly make their way back into their respective

quarters. Seeing this the abbot yelled out to them, “Visouth, Sam, Dara, Poun, come on up here!” From upstairs came a shout, “Choy mai-ai!!”, presumably from one of the monks called by the abbot. Loak Poun sitting next to me called the abbot “Ch’goo-ut!” only loud enough for those close by to hear. The abbot went back to speaking with the gentleman from the bus while the monks talked things over. Meanwhile, two young men, one monk and one layman, pretended to box near the front of Chum Kriel’s school not far from where the abbot was. Other monks were kicking a small toy around seeing how long they could keep it in the air between buildings and were seemingly unaware of the ambulance waiting for donors.

As the abbot and the gentlemen from the ambulance retreated towards the abbot’s house to discuss the payment for the new building, the monks took the opportunity to make themselves scarce and eventually the men left without anyone donating blood. Taken as a whole the entire scene in many respects seemed rather comical: a beaten down bus in the quad of a Buddhist temple seeking blood donations from monks; monks ‘hanging out’, relaxing or cursing under their breath at the thought of having to donate; and still other monks play-fighting not far from the *vihara* which, although the Sabbath, is locked due to the lack of village patrons who usually avoid the *wat* because they believe it to be ‘rich’.

The fact that it was *T’ngai Seul* was of no consequence and the general attitude of the monks could be explained by the status of the *wat* itself. As noted, Chum Kriel does not have the same association as other *wats* for villagers, urbanites, or even monks. The *wat* was always the monk’s school first and when speaking of *their wat* it meant their *home wat*, where they were ordained and lived prior to coming to Chum Kriel. This

was despite the fact that they spent the majority of their time at Chum Kriel and only went back to their home *wat* for holidays. In contrast to Kompong Dtrou Lite, *T'ngai Seul* at Chum Kriel did not have the usual lay members of the *sangha* staying around for the rest of day socialising, talking with the abbot, or discussing an upcoming festival.

The monks' perception of the *wat* also affected their subsequent duties. Given its large size with over 200 monks it was easy to disappear within the crowd. On the other hand, at Kompong Dtrou Lite (and other *wats* of comparable size) the obligation to fulfil requests was greater given that the locals, who probably knew them as children growing up, had a more personal connection with them. The monks' level of commitment to their vows and participation in ceremonies was greater given the personal investment they had in their home *wat*, home village, and their duty as a monk to the *sangha*. Their participation would increase their merit and that of their family's for contributing aid when it was requested. This would also benefit the *sangha*, *wat*, and village at large since the monk's status as a decent and giving individual increases the status of the *wat* and, therefore, its constituent parts.

Education within the Monastery

Education as a theme within anthropology has been of particular interest in countries such as the US and Great Britain where the emphases on an interdisciplinary approach early on was seen as an effective way to deal with educational problems. Specifically, problems in education arising from culture contact became a significant issue as various ethnic groups in the US and former British colonies came under greater control by those two nations (Eddy 1985:90). The problems arising from culture contact were also an issue for the French and their own colonial holdings in Southeast Asia. In Cambodia, French administrators turned over centuries old traditions of training young males within the Buddhist *wat* by creating a secular contemporary where both sexes could receive an education.

This may have had the initial appearance of a colonial power usurping what was once the purview of an institution bound by tradition, ritual, and religious dogma. However, far from marginalising aspects of identity through the introduction of new institutions that rivalled traditional ones, these new institutions also acted as nodes where cultural identities were formed and strengthened. Indeed, identity itself can emerge through the convergence of both local and global forces set in motion by colonisation (Steedly 1996:449). The role of schools as merely places where one learns to read and write is overturned when one compares the effects the colonial experience had on the role of education and how that education empowers groups to confront and determine their own identity.

As centres around which community and identity develops (Maddox 1994:114), schools can represent, for some, a means by which they attain certain statuses compared

to others. Indeed, the role schools play in societies has been described by Bourgois as the most important institution a state has which young people will encounter (1996:251). This results in educational institutions attaining particular types of symbolic capital (Levinson 1999:595). Yet, this symbolic capital comes in various forms, some of which involve broader institutions such as religious ones which provide not only more secular forms of capital (university degrees or social networks, for example) but also religious capital such as a perceived increase in piety. However, learning is done through attending lessons and also through peer interaction which produces other skills required outside of the school setting. While schools can embody their own form of power, it is also important to analyse exactly what kind of power they have in terms of how their symbolic and political-economic resources are used by social actors (Levinson 1995:596).

What is also important is an understanding that these actors engaged with educational institutions do not exist within a vacuum but are increasingly transformed by the interconnectedness of larger societal forces and movements (Hoffman 1998:339). Notions of identity thus correspond not so much to a singular understanding spread over a given cultural terrain, but cross-cultural conceptions of how that identity can be enhanced, augmented, and/or transformed through the consumption of the symbolic resources housed within schools. That is, how an individual transforms their own identity and, therefore, status with respect to another through the acquisition of an education.

The daily routine for monks at Chum Kriel begins as it does for all monks with daily prayers (for those who choose to participate) before they retreat to their dorms and

prepare for school. Classes run from 7-11am and again from 2-5 pm Monday through Saturday with only Sunday as a holiday. The teachers are generally older, more senior monks but if a particular monk is adept in a subject they may be called upon to act as tutors for others. The English teacher was from the Ministry of Education in Kampot town and taught twice a week at the request of the abbot. The rest of the class schedule is as follows:

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**
Sanskrit (1 hr)	Pali (1)	Pali (2)	Pali (2)	Khmer (2)	*Dhamma* (1)
Comparative Religion (1 hr)	Comparative Religion (1)				Earth Science, Astronomy (1)
AFTERNOON BREAK	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	**AFTERNOON BREAK**
Civics/Govt. (1 hr)	Physics (2)	Geography (1)	English (1)	Biology (1)	English (1)
Chemistry (2 hrs)	Khmer Literature, Culture (2)	Mathematics (2)	Biology (1)	History (1)	Sanskrit (1)
				Mathematics (1)	

Aside from Sanskrit and Pali, the schedule resembles a normal secular education. Comparative religion classes are offered twice a week on consecutive days while a class on the *dhamma* is only offered once a week for one hour. As the monks are in secondary school as opposed to primary they may not need as much training as would novices. However, the emphasis on Pali (although needed given its use in chanting the sutras) was described as difficult and not readily intelligible. I would compare it to the study of Latin in Western schools; learning the language is different from conversing in it.

Several monks reported that they do not understand what they are actually chanting but memorise it because it is the "language of Buddhism."

To what extent are monks truly adept in comparison to their counterparts in other Theravada Buddhist nations, particularly Thailand and Sri Lanka? Sri Lanka does hold a special status for many Khmer monks given its history with the religion and the fact that it was the bastion of Theravada Buddhism after it was extinguished in India. The opportunity for further schooling in Sri Lanka after their university studies is available as it is in Thailand where monks have traditionally gone given its close proximity. How adept Khmer monks are, though, in comparison to their international counterparts is a matter of debate. However, it is important to note alongside the destruction of ancient Cambodian Buddhist texts and execution of knowledgeable monks by the Khmer Rouge the fact that monks from Thailand and Sri Lanka helped (and continue to help) in the monastery's reconstruction both in training and materials.

Towards the end of September I conducted ad hoc group interviews with several monks at Chum Kriel as to what they are taught about the Khmer Rouge, a person's motivation for joining the monastery (likes/dislikes), knowledge of a particular Buddhist festival that was to occur shortly (*Prachum Benda*, the Festival of the Dead), and politics. What these interviews demonstrated was that monks did not necessarily learn more about the Khmer Rouge in Buddhist high schools than in public schools, however, destruction of the monastic order was common knowledge. Given their role as monks they were privy to more personal accounts by villagers and older members of the *sangha*. What was surprising regarding politics was the acknowledgment of the donations many political elites gave to local *wats* and the support the CPP controlled

government had among villagers. By contrast, the opposition party founded and headed by Sam Rainsy held widespread support among the monastic community. Sam Rainsy is an outspoken politician and his party is viewed by many Khmers as the only check against the rampant corruption plaguing the government. However, as will be discussed below, his outspokenness has also resulted in a crackdown by many associated with the government on his supporters, including many monks.

As noted, many did admit that there were some monks who joined specifically for an education and school in general was a motivating factor for many. This should not be too surprising since it is not uncommon for boys to be given to a *wat* if their parents are incapable of caring for them; many monks admitted that was how they first entered into the monastery. Even so, no one admitted to joining specifically for an education. The main distinction is volition; to be enrolled by one's parents when immature yet later choose to stay for an education differs from an older individual making a conscious choice to join explicitly for an education.

Secular education beyond the primary grades was sometimes unfeasible due to travel, work commitments at home, or the need for extra income which could prompt some parents to downplay the importance of school. Monastic schooling, on the other hand, benefited the young men, allowing them to pursue further education, and also their parents or caretakers who received merit for their son's service. This has been acknowledged historically (Steinberg 1959:65) and corresponds with the "Law of Karma" (Humphreys 1962:47). The reciprocal exchange of merit -- dutifully raising one's child and having that child give merit in return -- also ensures that harmonious relations between family members and the wider village continue through maintaining

an active *sangha*/monastery. Wat Chum Kriel and Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite were consistently described by individuals in terms of their festivals and the number of participants each respectively drew. This in turn was related to the monks serving the *wat*; the monks at Chum Kriel were seen as 'rich' and the festivals, therefore, did not draw as many participants as opposed to Kompong Dtrou Lite which was viewed as 'popular'.

Although the monks of Chum Kriel still created merit for their parents through service at the *wat*, the fact that most were there to attend the Buddhist high school and came from different parts of the province meant that the lack of connection with the local villagers was palpable (particularly since most locals would attend ceremonies at other *wats*). Even though my informants stated that repaying one's parents in merit was distinct from service at a particular *wat*, service at one's local village temple personalised interactions between the laity and monk community given the familiarity with one another and their families.

While school was cited time and again, studying the *dhamma* was normally cited last. Underlying themes of the *dhamma*, cause and effect, and the "warrior heritage" (Bit 1991) are replete throughout Khmer history and define many of the conceptions of hierarchy and status within the country. The "warrior heritage" itself documented by Bit (ibid) describes the all too often use of violence to secure and maintain social boundaries. However, the use of violence, while related to themes of cause and effect and the cycle of revenge that has been documented throughout Cambodia's history (Prasso 1994), can also be viewed in regards accepted social positions within Khmer society. Throughout the 1960s, then Prince Sihanouk regularly used beheadings as a

warning against anti-government activities to maintain his position as (although not stated) absolute ruler (Prasso 1994:72).

Yet, the "cosmic doctrine of duty" (Geertz 1983:196) compelling individuals to fulfil and express duties bound within their social roles need not necessarily be stated between two actors within a shared setting. Regarding the monastery, the role(s) monks play within everyday Khmer life often take into account the position of the *dhamma* without individuals needing to explain their actions in relation to it. Studying the *dhamma* is what monks do and it may strike a fellow Khmer as redundant to state it as such.

However, studying the *dhamma* is also listed as one of the least favourite occupations of the monastery given that it is ongoing. Although monks, they nonetheless have taken on a challenge that for many if not most at this point in their monastic career centres on successful completion of their education. In this light, it should be seen as more akin to the other less than popular aspects of the monkhood. These included restrictions on food consumption (monks cannot eat after 12 pm), limited travel, and adherence to the rules of the *Vinaya* which strictly govern their day to day lives.

This is also reflected in their answers regarding the *Prachum Benda* festival (or known simply as *Pchum Ben*) for those who of have died. After attending ceremonies at numerous *wats* aside from Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel, I noticed that one of the most striking differences is the motivation for conducting ceremonies at the latter. During *Pchum Ben*, when ceremonies are conducted at four o'clock every morning over a two week period, I attempted to go to Chum Kriel with an acquaintance, Tommy, 24, from Prey Thom commune. However, we arrived only to find that the monks had

decided not to conduct a ceremony that morning and were still in their quarters. Tommy noted that he had never seen anything like it before and was much more surprised than I was (the monks at the *wat* later stated the lack of a ceremony that particular morning was due to a lack of lay participants). We attended a different ceremony at a nearby *wat* that was much more stylised than the ones I had attended at Chum Kriel. I would attribute this to that notion of a 'home' *wat* noted above. The lack of participation at Chum Kriel suggests that surrounding villages may opt for other *wats* when given the choice, particularly if a *wat* is not held in high regard.

Secular Primary Education at Local Village Wats

As with other *wats* in the province, Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite had a temple school open to both boys and girls, which was similar to any other school save for the presence of the *vihara* and monks who tolerated the goings on of the children. Prior to 1975 there was a Buddhist primary school but it and the rest of the *wat* were destroyed; the nearest Buddhist primary school now is in Wat Chum Kriel. The current temple school, buildings, and *vihara* were all built by the CPP. Prime Minister Hun Sen's name was also written prominently on the front of the latter above the entrance (this donation has made the political party extremely popular within the area).

When school was in session the echo of children reciting their lessons broke the silence of the otherwise quiet surroundings of a rural *wat* within a sea of rice fields. At recess they would run about the temple grounds, climbing over the *vihara's naga* inspired railings, and stay in the *salaa* or monk's quarters joking and playing with one another as in any other setting. The only time one could see the true influence of the

state was at the end of the day as school adjourned and the children formed their respective queues to recite the national anthem. As with other schools, children were taught traditional Khmer folktales and the Khmer language. UNICEF and local NGOs have been helpful in this regard throughout the country in maintaining some of the traditional stories and literature lost during the DK years.

Classes are held every day except Thursday and Sunday. There may or may not be classes on *T'ngai Seul* depending on what day it falls, since it rotates every eighth and fifteenth day. Buddhist formalities (what to say and how to act around monks, for example) and subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic are included along with Khmer history classes. While they are taught the history of Cambodia its content leaves much to be desired according to many adult Khmers; this was expressed to me by a woman who lamented the fact that much of recent Cambodian history from 1970 on tends to be washed over in the curriculum, which fails to mention the role of many high ranking Khmer Rouge who are still free as well as the role of Vietnam post-1979.

The excerpts from school textbooks noted in the previous chapter would seem to correspond to this and my experience has shown that the level of knowledge of recent Cambodian history varied greatly according to geography and one's parent's or extended family's experience. One informant, living down the road from Kompong Dtrou Lite in Kompong Tralach village, provides a good illustration of that difference in knowledge. Wat, 22, lived with his parents and two siblings on 1.5 hectares of land. Behind their house situated among the rice fields was a large crater. Wat described it as from the Americans when, "They fought Vietnam," but many younger Khmers I knew in Kampot province did not know about the US bombing campaign. Within urban centres this was

somewhat different given the greater access to schools and media but still young Khmers know very little about the totality of experiences Cambodia faced during the 1970s nor which players (both individuals and nations) were involved. They did know and felt, however, the collective ill-will towards the Khmer Rouge as well as the Vietnamese who many blamed for stripping Cambodia of its natural resources during their occupation throughout the 1980s.

There was one teacher living at the Kompong Dtrou Lite, a gentleman named Heng, in his mid-thirties who had been a monk there for six years. He lived in the abbot's former house set up on stilts located immediately northwest of the *vihara*. Two other female teachers taught at the school but did not live in the area. The resident teacher was older than the monks save the abbot and helped them when there was a question relating to Buddhism or general queries of duties. In many ways he was *their* older brother whom they turned to given his age and the fact that he could relate to them as a former monk. The other residents within the immediate vicinity who were either *achars*, *don chis*, or members of the *sangha*, were much older than the monks but they felt less intimidated about asking these older members questions than they did the abbot as he was elderly and commanded a good deal of respect. Heng was approachable and spent a lot of time socialising with the monks, sleeping in a hammock he set up in Loak Poun's room during breaks between classes, and in general was someone the monks looked to for advice when they felt they could not approach the older members.

At the end of the day things would get much quieter as the children went home from their day's studies. For them, the temple was truly their school more than a place of worship and the members of the *sangha* accepted that at their age they were just 'being

kids'. As they grew older, proper Buddhist etiquette and deference would be expected. The few temple-boys at the *wat*, plus one young novice, aged ten, who occasionally attended school there, were separate from the other children in terms of their immediate duties[3]. Some of the benefits for a child living at a *wat* are housing, learning proper Buddhist practice and chants (which may help later on if they become a monk), and the ability to go to school without paying their teachers as has become the norm. They helped the monks, particularly the abbot, and other *achars* and *don-chis* in their activities, especially on *T'ngai Seul*.

At this age the school children treated monks and non-monks similarly while, as stated, the former seemed more akin to 'big brothers' rather than religious specialists. They joked with them and the children would play with them to an extent (young girls did not given the prohibition against female contact with males). Usually the monks seemed to tolerate them as older siblings would, giving them directions, and in general putting up with their childhood antics. At first glance the children actually seemed to run amok at recess even entering the *vihara* and climbing out its windows or going to the rear where the local pond was located. However, children in general were given a good deal of freedom to play and explore their surroundings before adolescence and added responsibilities set in.

As Kompong Dtrou Lite did not contain a Buddhist primary or secondary school the monks living there came in two categories: transient and resident. Transient monks were from other *wats* and passing through, taking a holiday, or visiting relatives in the

3 Ebihara's work in 1959-1960 cites a similar situation: children are given a lot of freedom to run around and play in the temple and do not necessarily show the same amount of deference to monks as they would once they are older (1968:395).

area. Resident monks were from the local villages and considered the *wat* their home *wat* even though most were attending the Wat Chum Kriel for high school. During my stay monks at Chum Kriel originally from Kompong Dtrou Lite would retreat there for their own holiday to visit family and friends and tend to the various Buddhist and life-cycle ceremonies. The holidays for Buddhist schools differ from those of public schools given the Buddhist festival calendar and the rules governing a monk's movement at certain times of the year. The number of monks fluctuated but there were generally six to nine monks at any given time (not counting the abbot who is also from Prey Thom) depending on whether any monks were passing through or visiting from another area.

Informants who did not enter the monastery but wanted to cited that their inability to join was due to taking on extra outside work to earn money for their families (for similar cases in Thailand see DeYoung 1955:169, Moerman 1966:147; see also, Ebihara 1968:416, for similar discussion on young men prevented from joining during her fieldwork in 1959-60). Based on my interviews over the course of my fieldwork, there would appear to be four broad areas under which parents may give their child to a *wat*:

A) Merit (for both the parents and the child).

B) Financial.

C) To ensure that at least one child or more will receive and education.

D) Some combination of the above.

The financial determinants for entering one's child into a *wat* would revolve around access to wealth, amount of land tilled (if they could afford to be without extra help, for example), and the number of children within a family. People may comment

that a child was given to a *wat* because the family could not afford to raise him but when pressed individuals would respond with, "Yes, merit also." Although not always expressed outright, acquiring merit, in general, is understood among villagers. A visiting monk at Kompong Dtrou Lite, Loak Ban, from a district near Prey Thom had a 'typical' experience many youths share: he served as a temple boy as a youth before becoming a monk at fifteen. When we met he was eighteen and did not know how long he planned on staying in the monastery. He acknowledged his situation was 'normal' and enjoyed his status as a monk. He noted that studying the *dhamma* and Pali sutras was difficult but he stayed in the monastery because he also enjoyed the opportunity to go to school. As with many other monks, when asked what would make him leave the monastery he noted a 'good job'. His time in the monastery allowed him extra time to study since he was saved from some of the normal activities of the countryside, particularly farming.

Tommy, noted above, had wanted to enter the monastery, however, after his mother and father were killed in an accident he took over as the primary bread-winner to support his younger siblings, although he still expressed interest in joining someday. His parents never entered him into a *wat* as a boy and his primary motivation for joining the monastery, both before and after their death, was a sincere interest in the religion (we attended several ceremonies together and he was very knowledgeable on the subject) and as a way to earn merit for his mother and father. Loak Ban and Tommy represent two slightly different models of those entering the monastery: those that are entered into a *wat* by their family and those that sincerely want to join out of interest and a feeling of obligation.

While both of them took the religion seriously their respective motivations are

not easily reconcilable. Even less so is the position of the government. The government's position towards religion has come full circle since 1979. Identifying and realigning with Buddhism serves a broader purpose of demonstrating the power of the state as the ultimate authority since it was the state that allowed for its re-establishment (for a similar discussion on citizenship and Buddhism in Thailand see Vandergeest 1993:865). Further, the secular state in this regard has in some ways usurped the identity enjoyed by the monarchy as not only the religion's guarantor but as its official head regardless of the monastic order (see Steinberg 1959:255).

Secondary Buddhist Education

Major expansion in Buddhist secondary school instruction began in 1998. Before that only Phnom Penh and the provinces of Battambang to the northwest and Kompong Cham to the southeast had Buddhist secondary schools; Wat Chum Kriel only had a Buddhist primary school but today boasts a temple school, primary school, and the only Buddhist secondary school in Kampot bringing in monks from all over the province. The *wat* is considered 'rich' since it is patronised by so many officials and receives a relatively generous amount from foreign donors, specifically from Japan which has an NGO working in the area. Aside from Phnom Penh and Kampot, the other provincial Buddhist secondary schools in Cambodia are located in Battambang, Prey Vieng, Svay Rieng, Kandal, Takeo, and Kompong Cham. Four hundred Buddhist primary schools are also scattered throughout the country. Their education is similar to that of secondary schooling with emphasis on Pali, Khmer, history, geography, mathematics, and 'general knowledge' (Ahmad-Zaki, www.hbfasia.org/southeastasia/thailand/projects/bud_inst.

htm, accessed 02 Feb. 05).

Examinations to progress to secondary school are rather challenging and not all monks opt for it. More ambitious individuals who choose the more difficult (according to monks) Buddhist secondary education instead of a public one are also generally those who desire more professional employment on the completion of their monastic service. At Kompong Dtrou Lite there were four monks attending school in Chum Kriel which is rather high relative to the number of monks (six to nine) living at the *wat*. Their proximity may influence the likelihood of being accepted but this was not expressed nor observed. Being from the area they were nonetheless 'locals' more so than monks from outlying districts.

Entrance into secondary school is also difficult due to the limited number of seats available. Those who do choose to go on also have the added opportunity to attend the Buddhist university in Phnom Penh. Although many monks expressed a desire to study at the university they acknowledged that it is very competitive which tended to make some apprehensive when discussing the likelihood of being accepted. The Buddhist university as well as primary and secondary schools are provided with materials from the Buddhist Institute. Before the war the Institute housed a collection of 30,000 to 40,000 works. During the war years it was almost all destroyed including the Khmer dictionary of Choun Nath (the late supreme patriarch of the *Mahanikaya* order known for his conservation efforts of the Khmer language and Khmer identity) and the translation of the *Tripitaka* that was the basis of Khmer religious and literary study as well as their magazine, *Kampuchea Suriya*, relaunched in 1994 (quoting Dr. Thonevath Pou in Ahmad-Zaki, http://www.hbfasia.org/southeastasia/thailand/projects/bud_ inst.

htm, accessed 02 Feb. 05).

In sum, Buddhist education is a way for those monks who choose to dedicate their lives (or at least a good portion of it) to the *sangha*, to rise within the ranks of the Buddhist hierarchy. There would be a greater motivation for completing one's education at the secondary level because, as noted, one of the main reasons cited for entering the monastery is school. Likewise, the subsequent peer pressure and 'loss of face' in the eyes of one's fellow monks, abbot, and *sangha* could act as a motivating force to remain enrolled compared with public schools where many tend to leave early due to a lack of money, the need to enter the job market, or to help out with domestic chores (the latter is especially true for females).

Most monks at Wat Chum Kriel agreed that a Buddhist education was better and more difficult than a public one given its inclusion of Pali and Sanskrit. As Loak Lon put it, "[it is] better for your [heart] (tapping his chest). You learn more truth." He also noted that while he felt that Buddhism helped society it also benefitted one as a student helping one to focus on their studies. While the Buddhist university is highly competitive (which they were well aware) it was nonetheless free while private universities were not and required a patron to finance one's studies (see below). However, most still held out the hope for study at a university since the likelihood of landing a decent paying job was much greater.

Extracurricular Schooling Outside of the Wat

Several monks at Chum Kriel would travel to Kampot town to attend extra English classes at night. They did this with the permission of the abbot and were very enthusiastic about learning the language. This was fairly common throughout the country and monks are not an exception when it comes to learning English even though they have a fairly full schedule. While English classes are free for monks, transportation is not and their ability to attend school many times is dependent upon patrons taken on as "godparents", in their words, especially expat-Khmers originally from the area. This is not necessarily unusual since such monks provide a bridge for those, particularly older, Khmers who have been able to maintain their connections with the area. As noted, both Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel have received generous donations from émigré Khmers who in turn receive merit for their support and retain a lifeline to their former home -- a process initiated in earnest by expatriates following the relaxation of religious restrictions by the PRK prior to Vietnam's pullout from the country in 1989 (Chandler 2000:236)

Attending other classes in Kampot town such as more technical courses was also possible. Two of my informants along with over 30 other monks at Chum Kriel finished an accounting course and received a certificate for their efforts. The class was made up entirely of monks and they were able to take the course free of charge. Loak Poun (who is widely considered one of the cleverest monks at the *wat*) approached the instructor at the privately run school with the names of those wishing to attend. A free education is not necessarily the norm and my informants admitted that this was probably a special case and not something that would be repeated on a regular basis.

For most monks, service within the monastery was viewed as being of limited duration. Their pursuit of either schooling within the monastery or through outside sources demonstrates that, while fulfilling certain family obligations through acquiring merit, monastic service is still seen by many as a viable means of improving one's eventual return to secular life. When queried, my informants invariably would admit that they would leave the monastery if they could find decent employment. This response came from some of the most knowledgeable and devout monks I worked with. Their position as monks within a rural setting came with responsibilities and duties which the majority thoughtfully carried out but there was the notion that an end to their service would occur at some point. The monastery helped considerably in attaining a decent education and had the added benefit of free classes outside of the main curriculum. However, the monastery is not without its challenges since the daily routine and monastic rules are by no means easy tasks to follow. Restrictions on movement, association, diet, and a transformation of their physical self (shaving one's head, adoption of a specific uniform, etc.) are things that not every male would freely choose.

* * * * *

Monastic identity is not necessarily tied to any one notion of duties or obligations but is formed through an individual's own perceptions of their role and the duties it includes as well as through the external views of the laity who depend on monks and the temples they serve in. The latter's perceptions are further formed through the actions of the former and the competency and diligence with which they perform those duties. This is also compounded by the associations, either real or imagined, monks maintain. Although schooling can have the ability to transform a person's identity

through their acquisition of knowledge and can elevate their status in the eyes of their peers, if this is not somehow transferred to people outside of a *wat* (such as local villagers) a monk could, and in reality does, take on several different identities.

One is, of course, developed through a monastic school and the symbolic capital that goes along with it such as being viewed as someone with a great deal of knowledge regarding the *dhamma*. Loak Puon was always cited as one of the more intelligent monks because of his studies and ability to recite long and difficult sutras. He was regularly requested over others to attend life-cycle ceremonies and was seen as someone who would go far either in or outside of the monastery. In this regard, his monastic identity was not necessarily bound to his saffron robe but to his diligence that went beyond the *wat* to whatever path he would inevitably choose. However, he and others who were known for their abilities lost this status the further they strayed from their 'home' *wat* and eventually succumbed to the mass identity that came with staying and studying at Wat Chum Kriel. Merely being at the *wat* meant that the monks who resided there took on dual identities: one within the wat and one without. And while this meant that they were cut off from many local villagers who tended to shy away from 'rich' *wats*, they were also granted access to larger spheres of contacts which would be beneficial should they choose to further their career in the capital.

The transformation of identity through schooling does indeed mean that an individual acquires symbolic capital but if that capital has no forum within which it could be spent its acquisition could prove to be a non-sequitur. Returning to village life upon the completion of school could validate suspicions in the eyes of some and could mean that an individual's status is actually lowered. This is dependent upon an

individual's actions as a monk, though, and one who is competent and carries out his duties faithfully may be forgiven for living a privileged life at one time. Further, the idea of a supra-identity needs to be addressed: that form of an identity that contains its own status hierarchy that expands or contracts according to wider cultural shifts. The status of monks certainly hit its lowest point during the Khmer Rouge regime but consequently grew after the Vietnamese invasion and prolonged insurgency. The status of being a monk was determined by the believed need for a monastery to return to some sort of normalcy but also by the need for young men to fight. Being a monk may have meant a return to something thought lost for some while for others it may have meant a chance to escape the possibility of death.

Considering that most monks enter the monastery as teens or young adults and go on to serve the spiritual needs of a village while undergoing a liminal separation from family and friends, the idea that they have a privileged life is somewhat misleading. Although the financial burden may be lifted off their families, monks must still be supported by their local village. Financial relief is, therefore, shared with the wider population. However, the amount of support varies according to the location of the village and *wat* (in relation to urban centres, for example), the importance of Buddhism to villagers, and the perception of a *wat* or monks held by those villagers. The financial burden on a village as a whole would be lifted if young men did not enter the monastery but given the *wat's* many roles, the support of a *wat* benefits a community even if its constituents are not particularly devout. Also, as agricultural cycles are intertwined with the various Buddhist ceremonies held throughout the year, it is difficult to envision a village without its local temple to mark the seasons and growing/harvesting cycles.

Even so, it is reasonable to ask whether some other type of secular institution could take the place of a religious one. However, this would require either an expansion of the government (as occurred during the Vietnamese occupation) or some other type of entity to fill the void left by the temple's absence (such as the current proliferation of NGOs). Given the starvation post-1979, the current need for international aid and the role of NGOs throughout the countryside, the local *wat* retains a viable place in an agriculturally based village economy. While this varies according to region, the lack of similar infrastructure in Cambodia's recent past suggests that the rapid cultural change the country experienced and the conflicts that arise over land from time to time (on both the interpersonal and state level) require some local intermediary to resolve these issues. The next chapter will address the dismantling of the monastery during the DK regime and the early connections the Khmer Rouge made with the monastery to gain the trust of villagers. It will also cover the reconstruction of the monastery, its voice throughout the countryside, as well as the government's influence on that voice.

4. The Local Wat before and after Democratic Kampuchea

It would be difficult to describe a 'typical' experience by Khmers during the war years given the disparity in command structures established by the DK regime. Practices and procedures varied according to province with some experiencing greater atrocities than others. I will begin with a discussion of some of the contrasting experiences of Khmers in several provinces as reported to me by monks and survivors of the DK regime. However, this is not meant to be a representative account. What it is meant to show are the similarities and dissimilarities of the monastery's destruction and reconstruction and also the perception of the Khmer Rouge by individuals in different parts of the country. I will also discuss the nature of the monastery's reconstruction (for example, how it began, who were allowed to become monks) and the influence of political and quasi-political entities on the monastery from the Khmer Rouge to the current government.

The use of monumental architecture and skeletal remains as political 'proof' is also important when addressing the monastery's reconstruction and whether these contribute to a 'field of merit' (Tambiah 1970:345) whereby survivors of the holocaust can create merit for the spirits of lost relatives. Tambiah's 'field', though, referred to the creation of a collective identity in opposition to an 'other' -- which is difficult to reconcile in the case of Cambodia given that this 'other' was also Khmer. One could conclude that the 'other' were the perpetrators (i.e., Khmer Rouge cadre) who victimised ordinary Khmers. One must concede, though, that many people, particularly the young,

were pressed into the Khmer Rouge and committed acts of violence on threat of death.

The question remains of how does one know that the remnants of their loved ones are housed within a given memorial and/or does it really matter? The commemoration of funerals and their value for public displays of bereavement have been examined by anthropologists in the past (Goody 1962; Bloch 1971; Danforth 1982). So too have the political uses of war memorials and the hero-systems that developed around those killed in battle as a means of reasserting the importance of a nation and the commonality of a people (Becker 1971; Bloch 1981). Although the remains of individuals interned within memorials are not necessarily from those killed in battle, they do represent a commonality among Khmers as victims of an ongoing Communist revolution and, therefore, those killed in an ongoing battle of ideologies even if unknowing participants.

However, substituting the identity of an individual for the collective loss of the country can personalise a memorial. Local villagers near Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite knew (or at least were fairly confident) that the remains housed within the *wat's* memorial were more than likely their deceased relatives. Some memorials also represent that collective experience such as the *Choeung Ek* memorial at the well known 'killing fields' near Phnom Penh and the collective identity of those who died. That is, those aspects of identity shared by a group through similar experiences and expressions which intersect with personal identities (Oring 1994:212). For Tambiah, ethnic identity *is* collective identity which substantialises and naturalises one or more attributes and "attaches them to collectives as their innate possession and their mytho-historical legacy" believed to be bounded, self-producing, and enduring over time (1989:335). In

this manner, memorials may come to represent the collective relationship between survivors and those lost since so many Khmers do not have direct knowledge that a certain relative was killed but that they disappeared during the war.

The re-establishment of the *sangha* and the use of evidence and monumental architecture also reinforce political influence over the monastery as its benefactor and defender (such as allowing it to return, patronising memorials, and donating money). Further, re-establishing who may join, how many, and in what manner re-establishment will occur has also determined its voice on wider issues of politics and government reform. These and other issues of political influence will be discussed in relation to entities associated with pro-government activities.

Similarities and Differences under the Khmer Rouge Regime

Vickery uses the term "Standard Total View" (STV) to describe the tendency by researchers to represent the DK experience in holistic terms as though the entire country experienced a single current of events (1984:28). However, the perception of the outside world regarding the years 1975-1979, was dominated by a few sources, two of the most prominent being the Vietnamese government and the newly established PRK government. Both had a vested interest in presenting a view of the war years as the same throughout the country. Yet, as accounts from refugees have shown, whereas some areas such as the Northwestern, West, and Southwestern Zones were under tight control and witnessed many atrocities, others such as the Eastern Zone experienced, by and large, policies described by some as "relatively benign" (Stuart-Fox and Ung 1998:72).

As one of the most productive rice growing regions along with Battambang in

the northwest, the Eastern Zone was also different in other respects. Each zone (*phumipeak*) was broken down into regions (*damban*), districts (*srok*), sub-districts (*khum*), and finally villages (*phum*). The Eastern Zone, however, kept the traditional names for each district (Kiernan 1997 [1996]:89). Indeed, the reason cited for the rebellion in 1977, led by the Khmer Rouge commanders Heng Samrin and Hun Sen was that they and their supporters defected to Vietnam after becoming aware of the western atrocities. However, the continuous and erratic purges of cadre members by the Centre Zone were also likely to have influenced their decision.

After the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, monks still could be seen in the country, the only difference was that they were to work like everyone else and were restricted from proselytising. The Khmer Rouge eventually forced monks out as they realised they could no longer properly follow monastic rules. A year later all had to defrock but there is evidence that monks could still be seen in 1976 and 1977 in Battambang in the northwest and Kratie in the east (Vickery 1984:180). Much like the disparate policies followed by different zones and their different commanders, so too the military appeared to be an ad-hoc assemblage of policies and people. Some were truly socialist while others were driven by personal motivations for power and revenge. My interviews with monks in the northwestern province of Kompong Thom near Lake Tonle Sap related strong support for the DK regime, however, this was largely attributed to the massacre of large numbers of ethnic Vietnamese in the area who have historically been viewed with disdain.

In the far south of the country in Svay Rieng province bordering Vietnam, ethnic Vietnamese were also massacred but this was noted alongside a similar fate suffered by

Khmers. And in the former capital of Udong, northwest of Phnom Penh, monks told of how the once ubiquitous sight of temples in the area (King Sihanouk commissioned over 100 after independence from France) was transformed as the Khmer Rouge dismantled them and killed, starved, or forcibly disrobed the once strong monastic presence. The death of so many monks through these tactics also correlates with a common theme associated with 'New People', who "were enemies, incorrigible, and would remain so" (Stuart-Fox and Ung 1998:75).

While the above accounts are limited and not meant to be representative of each area, they do affirm Vickery's and other accounts of the differences in attitude towards the Khmer Rouge from region to region. They do share similar experiences -- destruction of *wats*, forced disrobing, and the killing of monks -- yet each one reflects the local attitudes, demographic makeup, and political patronage which helped determine the demeanour of the Khmer Rouge and each region's inhabitants. For example, while the Western and Southern/Southwestern zones were particularly harsh towards monks, others, such as Kompong Thom, incorporated them within the local Khmer Rouge hierarchy. Kampot province was one of the last holdouts for the Khmer Rouge and saw heavy fighting throughout the 1990s; many locals worked for the transitional PRK government in their effort to crush them. Even so, there were also those who supported the Khmer Rouge either out of necessity or affinity. This will be discussed in more detail below.

Early Connections between the Khmer Rouge and Buddhist Monastery

Ebihara's work in central Cambodia showed that by 1959 many young men, rural and urban, had rejected Buddhism or at least the formalities due to their secular education and modern life (1968). Vickery states that for rural peasants there was a disconnect between those who could afford the loss of labour and send their children to the monastery and acquire merit and those who could not (1984:9). The inability to acquire merit to the same degree as others may have resulted in people from some areas resenting a traditional stage of life in which they were unable to participate (ibid). The disaffection with monks and Buddhism was also brewing within secular education taught increasingly by intellectuals upholding their newfound Marxist ideology acquired abroad.

As the Sihanouk regime became progressively heavy-handed in repressing demonstrations and Communist parties, the monastery became steadily linked to this repressive, 'old' political system. Monks were, therefore, viewed as representatives of this 'old' order, living off the labour of others (Vickery 1984:11). As unrest with the status-quo increased in the cities and the Communists gained greater control in the countryside, Buddhism and monks represented the elite to urban students and freeloaders to rural Communists and consequently lost ground on both fronts.

Disaffected peasants who did not/could not participate in religious ceremonies because they were less financially solvent or due to other reasons (such as the lack of a temple) also lacked the same deferential attitude normally displayed. What they could participate in was what both monks and lay people called the 'original' religion of folk beliefs that provided protection on a daily basis but did not require the same level of

supporting specialists dependent upon daily donations. As the Khmer Rouge's Marxist ideology gained momentum throughout the countryside, it chided the monastery's position of privilege which not only required financial support from the community but also meant that a sizable portion of local young men were prohibited from labouring in the fields. However, there were monks who supported the Communists prior to their victory just as there were monks who supported the Republic under General Lon Nol. In 1978, Nuon Chea, Deputy Secretary of the CPK, in a statement to the Communist Worker's Party of Denmark, stated that the Khmer Rouge recruited monks early on, telling them that if foreign invaders occupied the country it would mean the end of Buddhism:

> We even worked within the movement of Buddhist monks, making them follow us by saying we would defend the country and religion. If the country were to become dominated by foreigners, there would no longer be any religion. So monks, too, held aloft our banner even if they did not like communism. We worked not only among the rank-and-file monks – they were not so reactionary, in any case – but also among high-ranking monks who controlled large parts of the country. We used slogans opposing foreign suppression of the culture of Kampuchea. Monks then became patriotic, supporting us without being aware of it (www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/DK_Policy/DK_Policy_Noun_Chea_Statement.htm, accessed 12 July 05).

The monastery was in a quandary in that it had some members supporting the government and others the Communists, yet it was also under attack. After the Khmer Rouge victory the Communists still had the support of some monks. In Chhouk district, some 40 km north of Kampot Town, there was a district committee of revolutionary monks who held meetings explaining why monks had to do practical work (prohibited by the *Vinaya*) and not live off the work of others (Vickery 1984:180). However, once the monastic community chose sides they in essence lost their moral authority should their side win or lose. This conflicting stance may have had repercussions on the behaviour exhibited by monks who supported the Communists and were subsequently

defrocked after the Khmer Rouge victory. Vickery cites several examples given by refugees and survivors to show that many local DK cadres were former monks (1984:104,125). When he visited Cambodia in the early 1980s he noted, "In some districts...many low-level DK cadres were former monks or *achars*, and they often seemed to be among the most strict disciplinarians" (ibid 179).

Use of Neo-Monumental Architecture Post-Khmer Rouge

After 1979, the Heng Samrin led PRK government called for all remaining academics and technicians to report to the capital while Vietnam brought in advisors to lecture on its policies towards Cambodia, relations between the two, and the need for close cooperation between the three states of Indochina, Laos being the third (Stuart-Fox, Ung 1998:174, 177). The Vietnamese stressed that their motivation for the invasion was altruistic. Those Khmers that rejected the ultra-nationalistic (and thoroughly anti-Vietnamese) line of the Khmer Rouge and displayed a 'proper' attitude were sent to Vietnam for training and then returned to senior positions under the supervision of Vietnamese advisors. Following this, an intense period of re-education occurred that stressed that the atrocities of the Pol Pot regime were only put to a halt by the invasion of their Vietnamese brothers. At this point the official line given by the Vietnamese for the invasion had to be matched by the evidence. The new administration was pressed to exhume the mass graves with the help of Vietnamese forensic specialists while the Tuol Sleng Museum noted below was created where foreign visitors, public servants, soldiers, and school children were taken to view the atrocities of the previous four years (ibid 177).

In a memo dated 05 October 1983 the Ministry of Information and Culture encouraged people to "carry on their vengeance" and build at least one memorial site in each province and municipality on January seventh, Liberation Day (now known as Victory over Genocide Day) prior to its fifth anniversary, resulting in eighty memorials being built across the fifteen provinces (Hughes 2004:278). Although the anniversary is not as filled with anti-Khmer Rouge rhetoric since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, it has taken on the role of a day of remembrance and a chance for people to go and make merit at temples and pray for those who were killed. The participation of locals on another day of remembrance, May twentieth, the 'Day of Hate' or the 'Day to Remain Tied to Anger' celebrated from 1979 to 1991, represented the reconstruction of a larger revolutionary state as well as providing an opportunity to promote the notion of solidarity with Vietnam during its decade of occupation (ibid 280).

Displays of solidarity took into account the historic animosity between the two countries but they were also designed to stem possible support for the Khmer Rouge insurgency and present Vietnam as a liberator to the world community. Cambodia and Vietnam had endured centuries of conflict culminating with the loss of Kampuchea Krom (later known as South Vietnam) to Vietnamese colonisers. This animosity is still present in the minds of most Khmers who still view southern Vietnam as part of Cambodia. Indeed, the catalyst for the Vietnamese invasion in 1979 was The Khmer Rouge's incursion into the area to retake what was the foundation for the first of the great Khmer Kingdoms, Funan.

The January seventh liberation anniversary is a chance for Khmers to visit the

Choeung Ek memorial at the 'killing fields' outside Phnom Penh, noted above. Originally a Chinese graveyard, it became a mass grave for thousands from 1977-79 most of whom were tortured and killed at the notorious S-21, or Toul Sleng prison ('place of the poisoned tree' in Khmer) in the capital. It is supposed to be reminiscent of the Royal Palace while the roof represents the axis mundi or 'world mountain' (Mt. Meru) while the 'sky tassels' on roof gables are to ward off unsavoury spirits as giant *nagas* guard the roof's four corners (Hughes 2004:272-275). The memorial is viewed by many Khmers as a dangerous place since it houses the remains of those who died violent deaths which is believed will cause their spirits to wander near the spot, unable to move on to the next stage of existence. Many also find it offensive to publicly display bones randomly put together. Historically, cremating the dead has been a tradition in many Buddhist countries for centuries, and many Cambodians still believe that cremating the dead will help ease their transition to rebirth (http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Buddhist_Cremation_Traditions.htm, accessed 14 Aug. 05).

The first exhumations in 1980 found 89 mass graves out of an estimated 129 within the area (Hughes 2004:270). A reported 8,985 skeletons were removed with the assistance of Vietnamese forensic specialists and were treated with chemical preservatives before being placed in an open walled memorial-pavilion. After initial exhumations no further preservation efforts were proposed until the mid-1980s and large scale construction on the site did not occur until early 1988. Skeletal remains were moved to a sealed glass display within a large concrete Memorial Stupa complete with signs giving information and the number of victims recovered (ibid). The role of the remains is to serve as quantifiable evidence, or "proof" of DK crimes according to

General Mai Lam of Vietnam and this is echoed by signboards and individual testimony (Ledgerwood in ibid 271).

The stupa at *Choueng Ek* has also come to serve several secular purposes: educational, documentary evidence of genocide serving as a legal justification for Vietnam's invasion, and proof that the country desperately needed humanitarian aid. The change in the country's political attitude reflected broader developments such as the collapse of the USSR and the pull out by Vietnam in 1989. According to Cougill, the Vietnamese-installed PRK sought to preserve the remains to "Prove that their ideological and political enemy China had been behind the mass murders in Cambodia. Later, they viewed the bones as evidence of genocide and thus a justification for the PRK's control of the country" (www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Buddhist _Cremation_ Traditions.htm, accessed 14 Aug. 05).

Prior to this effort, the Vietnamese established PRK government provided little support for Buddhism's reconstruction. Officials patronising the stupa after 1989 helped counter claims that the CPP and Prime Minister Hun Sen lacked commitment to the Khmer Rouge tribunals. In 2001, Hun Sen issued a government directive to provincial and municipal authorities to preserve the remains housed in memorials as evidence of DK crimes. According to Hughes, this on-going valuation of remains has helped perpetuate the CPP's mythologized image as the party of liberation (2004:285). The Documentation Center of Cambodia echoes similar sentiments (Kosal, http://dccam.org/nppe.htm, accessed 11 July 05). While the keeping of remains in memorials throughout the country has been lamented by King Sihanouk who favours cremation, they do have a therapeutic value for those who lived through the holocaust to

remember loved ones lost since the whereabouts of their remains will never be known for sure.

The memorials have come to represent *political* ('proof', national unity/legitimacy), *economic* (need for aid), and *religious* symbols; the latter more so in the late 1980s when the government needed to expand public support as Communist aid and Vietnamese troops left the country. With the threat of the Khmer Rouge still present and fighting continuing in the countryside, the PRK government had to reinforce the idea that they were the sole legitimate power. Thus, the need to demonstrate a level of conspicuous religiosity also increased with the departure of the Vietnamese. By late 1988 the PRK had an abrupt policy change towards religion in recognition that its own existence needed broader popular support. Every visiting foreign official was brought to *Choeung Ek* to pay their respects and this was accompanied by an increase in Buddhist ceremonies by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Government expenditure for the restoration and construction of Buddhist images also increased as did the granting of permission for villages to restore local temples (Keyes 1990:4).

What needs to be examined in future research is the loss of humanity of those re-classified as 'New People' during the DK regime and the shift in environmental behaviour (Stets and Biga 2003). Stets and Biga identified individual agency as important in influencing environmentally responsive behaviour (2003:399). Yet, this agency is largely through identity processes and not attitude processes given that a person's identity acts as an important motivator for behaviour (ibid 418). If losing one's sense of humanity or 'human-ness' through reclassification also translated into skeletal remains losing their physical and symbolic importance, this may account for the

haphazard manner in which many remains were treated. Through the hyper-mechanisation policies of the Khmer Rouge (performing the same tasks over and over with seemingly no end) the loss of a collective Khmer social identity of belonging to a certain group (Hogg and Abrams 1988) redefined one's self-categorisation. Accentuating one's similarities and differences with 'in' and 'out' group members respectively (Stets and Burke 2000:225) possibly altered the view of the numerous killing fields with remains being seen as simply part of the environment as opposed to former living individuals.

However, on a more practical level one must consider that Khmers had bigger issues to contend with, namely their own survival and the constant threat of the ongoing insurgency. Even though the country was still embroiled in war, the eventual need for fixed sites of remembrance was a way for the PRK government to gain international recognition (Hughes 2004) while appeasing the populace, many of whom were already rebuilding temples and constructing makeshift shrines for the deceased. Yet, state sanctioned memorials also allowed for individuals to create merit for those lost whereby remains regained, in part, a claim to a former 'in-group' status within the collective Khmer social identity (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Even so, whether the excavation of the killing fields and state sanctioned building of memorials necessarily meant a shift in the behaviour of younger Khmers towards the land and, therefore, human remains needs to be explored further.

Social Order and the Re-establishment of the Sangha

With the lessening of restrictions on Buddhism beginning in the early 1980s, continuing through the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, there was once again a growth of *sanghas* within the country. Those who were allowed to become monks immediately after 1979 were from older generations (50 years old and up), a fact that was the reverse of Cambodian life prior to 1975 (Ebihara 1987:43). Given the conflict Cambodia has witnessed, the quality of Cambodian Buddhism and the issue of folk tradition's impact, particularly on village life, come into question. The importance of local folk deities in a largely agrarian society such as Cambodia centres on real concerns such as crop production that an imported religion might not directly speak to. As such, "It plays a part in the villagers hopes and fears and is much more lively than the myths and rituals of imported Hinduism, or even the much more popular Buddhism with which the Khmers identify themselves in modern times" (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:111).

Regarding the re-establishment of the monastic line, a generational issue is raised. The official reason for accepting only men over 50 after the Pol Pot era was to keep the youth in productive services (Vickery 1986:162). However, this also meant that those who were previously Khmer Rouge combatants could not enter. Whether this was intentionally implemented by the Vietnamese to keep past foes out of potentially influential positions in political and village life is uncertain. Further, whether Cambodians themselves would be against former Khmer Rouge entering the temple may be a different question. As quoted to Jackson by a mother of twelve, nine of whom along with her husband died from treatment by the Khmer Rouge, "I do not hate the Khmer Rouge. Such was our karma"; "Wait for the next reincarnation" (1989:172). Given the

country's poverty and continued attacks by Khmer Rouge guerrillas throughout the 1990s, developments at the local level require an examination of how the Buddhist temple/*sangha* relate to the everyday, real concerns of peasants who underwent such a drastic cultural change in such a short period of time. This calls into question the type of group identity the *sangha* creates as well as the identity that is recognised by local populations monks interact with daily.

However, questions of legitimacy persisted. As the populace had already experienced the unique brand of 'socialism' under the Khmer Rouge, they were not ready to accept policies associated with the DK regime. The PRK government turned to tradition to act as a bridge towards international recognition and part of that policy was to re-establish Buddhism. In 1979, Theravadin monks from Vietnam went to Cambodia to re-ordain those who had been forced to disrobe (Keyes 1990). According to the Supreme Patriarch of the *Mahanikaya* sect, the Venerable Tep Vong (who in 1979 was the highest ranking monk in the PRK) and the Venerable Oum Sum (another high ranking member of the *sangha*), the Vietnamese delegation included a Khmer who would serve as preceptor for the ordination, a role Tep Vong played before his escape to Vietnam in 1975 (Keyes 1994:60).

Keyes notes that the role of preceptor and his qualifications are vital as major schisms in Theravada Buddhism are related to the non-recognition of the ordination genealogy of some monks by others (1994:60). After 1979, seven former monks of 'good character' all of whom had been in the *sangha* for decades prior to 1975 (seven monks are required to constitute a chapter as stated by the rules of ordination) were chosen to ordain a second group and thereby re-establish the *sangha's* seniority.

Seniority was according to the order in which one was ordained -- Tep Vong was the first to be ordained and, therefore, the most senior. These monks then travelled to the other provinces to create chapters of seven monks each and thus re-establish the genealogy around the country (ibid 61). Along with the re-ordinations the government began to allow the restoration of temples and manufacturing of Buddhist images. By 1980 monks began to hold Buddhist festivals again and three monks were reported to have been included on the National Council with Tep Vong as vice-president of the Central Committee. A year later it was reported that 500 monks and 1,500 novices had already been ordained (ibid).

However, by 1981 things became more difficult. Only men of good moral character over 50 with no connection with the Khmer Rouge were permitted to join as young men were needed for the army. A few were allowed to join for meritous purposes but as the country was still at war with the Khmer Rouge insurgency, the PRK government (who needed to secure their own right to be in the country) could not afford to have a separate entity that could potentially hold sway over the populace. Kiernan noted that early on the PRK stated that the country was not productive enough to support a strong *sangha* (Kiernan in Keyes 1990:4). Cheatlom, my initial contact noted in chapter one who was himself a former monk put it succinctly, “Elders returned and people were allowed to become monks in 1982. Before that the young could not be monks, they had to fight the Khmer Rouge. 1982-1989 there were only a few old monks.” By 1982 an official report put the number of monks at 2,311, 800 of whom were monks before the DK regime (Keyes 1994:61).

However, young men did go into the monastery to avoid the draft. Older male

informants noted that this was a well known problem. Since the government needed soldiers and had already brought back the Buddhist *wat*, the only real way they could maintain both was by putting tight restrictions on the latter while expanding the former. At the local level, opting for the monkhood instead of the military more than likely was not a decision of conscience but one spurned by a desire to avoid a conflict that had already claimed the lives of so many. Cheatlom related that he initially entered the monastery specifically to avoid military service. He was separated from his parents by the Khmer Rouge and was put on a collective where he essentially raised his younger brother in near starving conditions (he himself was almost beaten to death for taking a mango from a tree). He subsequently stayed on as a monk for a number of years and became a very knowledgeable source regarding Cambodian Buddhism.

His story and other accounts as to the motivation for those choosing to enter the monastery immediately after 1979 cannot be accurately determined by this study. However, given the bloody nature of the war and the need for manpower after the Vietnamese invasion it is not inconceivable that for many young men service in the monastery was indeed more desirable than military service. Service in the monastery acted as a traditional means for economic and social mobility as it had prior to the increasing turmoil after independence (Steinberg 1959) but also as a way to remove oneself from the ongoing conflict. Further research is required as to whether the monastery was thus a vehicle of resistance for young men after 1979 and whether this was driven in part or in whole by the Vietnamese occupation.

In January 1989, Prime Minister Hun Sen apologised to audiences around the country for the "government's 'mistakes' towards religion" (Hiebert in Keyes 1990:4).

In Kampot, the prime minister pointed out that the General Secretary of the PRK, Heng Samrin, and Chairman of the National Assembly, Chea Sim, had been former members of the *sangha*. He also told an Australian journalist that he had "good memories" of living in a *wat* as a child in Phnom Penh (Keyes 1990:4). Also in 1989, Hun Sen, Heng Samrin, and other officials attended a ceremony where a relic of the Buddha was placed in a shrine in front of the Phnom Penh railway station. That same year restrictions on ordaining monks under 50 were removed as well as an unpopular tax on monasteries (ibid).

Political and Religious Associations

In a strictly economic and military sense, the PRK government was not necessarily unreasonable in delaying the full re-establishment of the *sangha*. As it is reasonable to conclude that the country was not strong enough to fight the insurgency without Vietnamese help, to suggest that having a proportion of the populace engaged in non-secular work while politically and militarily embattled would be uneconomical and militarily unsound (Kiernan [1982] implies a similar argument in terms of strict economics: Cambodian society was not productive enough to support monks living off donations from peasants while being separated from secular employment. Although it can be argued that rejecting ordinations only to put those same men in the army would not be wise militarily in regard to a soldier's motivation, it would probably be less wise to allow for an influential, and potentially critical, group to exist while under foreign occupation and facing an ongoing insurgency.

The PRK kept the number of ordained monks low; numbers varied from 8,000 in

1985 to 6,500 in 1989 as reported by Ros Chhnum, General Secretary of the Council of the United Front for the Construction and Defense of the Kampuchean Fatherland (made up of non-party sectors of the country) meaning that the total number was less than ten percent of pre-1975 numbers (Keyes 1990:3-4). Prior to 1989, one had to put in a request to the government to get out of the mandatory two year tour in the military. As the government lacked legitimacy and the threat from the Khmer Rouge remained very real, there was the fear that the *sangha* could emerge as a separate and independent entity apart from the state. The need for soldiers was, therefore, offset against the need to keep out 'unhealthy beliefs' as decreed by the PRK party leadership at the second congress of monks meeting in 1984 (ibid).

The *sangha* went from 2,700 members in 1982; 6,500 to 8,000 in 1985-89; 20,000 in 1991 (Keyes 1994); to 50,081 in 1998-99. Throughout the 1990s the nation's Buddhist *sangha* increased dramatically as did the number of *wats*. A lack of restrictions meant that Buddhism was finally allowed to regain its former status. Yet, that status would be qualified through the loss of Buddhist texts, icons, and knowledgeable specialists. Still, the amount of material goods and money that villagers will give to rebuild local *wats* is remarkable. While much credit is due to locals, the contribution by expats certainly has been dramatic. Going into any temple one will likely see written on the walls the names of Khmers living abroad who have donated large sums of money. As noted above, at Kompong Dtrou Lite the names of Khmer expatriates from the US cover the walls of the *salaa* followed by their donations adding up to several hundred US dollars.

While government assistance has been received by some *wats*, the space a local

wat occupies in a village as a galvanising centre for social and political change demonstrates the need for locals to recreate it with or without political help. The status of the *sangha* should also be looked at in the face of this social change. The loss of social capital of parental authorities along with traditional spiritual/village authorities affected the manner in which the *sangha* would be reformed. Saam, the father of an informant who was a monk prior to the Khmer Rouge regime noted that whereas before the regime's rise to power there were strong communal ties, after 1979 people were not as willing to help one another with farming while the role of the market system became more dominant. He went on to add that with the demise of Buddhism "People were forced to pick leaders," who were generally not trusted and did not last long, or as he put it, "No Buddhism, society is empty."

Saam had a particularly interesting story in that after leaving the monastery in his early twenties, he returned to his home only to be removed by the Khmer Rouge in 1975 to a commune along with his fellow Prey Thom residents to cultivate rice. He later worked on the dam to the immediate north of Kompong Dtrou Lite and cited the numerous deaths that occurred during its construction through overwork and a lack of food. After a couple of years, he and another man escaped one night moving south through the local mountains and forest to the border of Vietnam. There he became part of the invasion force being formed by the Vietnamese. In 1979, he commanded an infantry unit in the invasion to overthrow the DK regime. After driving out the Khmer Rouge from Kampot province into the mountains where the Communists would continue their insurgency, he worked in Phnom Penh with the central military authority. He later moved back to Prey Thom commune not far from where he was originally

from, married, had three children, and returned to a life of rice farming. Upon hearing this story related to me by his son, Wet, I could not help to remark on what an incredible tale it was and how his father had played such an important role in the country's history. Wet thought it over for a moment and said in a nonchalant voice, "No…that's pretty normal."

The role of the *sangha* as a potential rival and catalyst for social and political change began to make a return following the UN backed elections in 1993. The bargain that was eventually reached and the events resulting from it also represent some of the idiosyncrasies of the country and its tendency towards totalitarian rule (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:259). Indeed, many of the international parties and nations involved allowed for nearly any compromise to be reached as long as it ended their entanglement in the nation's problems, for many of which they were partly to blame. These included the support of the exiled DK regime and its UN seat during the Vietnamese occupation of the 1980s.

The elections initially resulted in a victory for Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party with Hun Sen's CPP party coming in second. However, as the CPP controlled large portions of the military and refused to give up power, a shaky partnership was formed where both Ranariddh and Hun Sen would act as co-prime ministers. It also resulted in FUNCINPEC's vocal finance minister, Sam Rainsy, being sacked early on which led Rainsy to form his own opposition party (Amnesty International 1997). By 1997, both the CPP and FUNCINPEC began courting Khmer Rouge insurgents in an attempt to gain support prior to the next year's election. Things quickly worsened between the two sides and in the same year a grenade attack against a peaceful and lawful protest by Sam

Rainsy and his supporters killed sixteen people in front of the National Assembly.

A similar attack had been conducted eighteen months earlier on the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) (Amnesty International 1997). The attack was alleged to have been orchestrated by members of Hun Sen's private security force and those members of the police and military loyal to the CPP. The military itself was split along party lines and soon those units loyal to the CPP began attacking units loyal to Ranariddh in and around Phnom Penh leading many to think that a new civil war was about to occur (Swain 1997). After troops loyal to FUNCINPEC were defeated, Ranariddh and hundreds of his supporters, FUNCINPEC politicians, and thousands of ordinary Khmers fled the country, the latter to the Thai border as many did in 1975. Hun Sen was ushered in as the sole prime minister while Ranariddh and his supporters were tried and convicted in absentia by military courts. After assurances to the UN that they would be safe, they were allowed to return to contest the elections held for 1998 (Amnesty International 1997).

Following the elections, protests led by FUNCINPEC, the Sam Rainsy Party, and other minor parties were held in front of the National Assembly for alleging voter fraud and electoral irregularities. Police and military crackdowns on thousands of protestors quickly began resulting in crowds quickly dispersing only to re-assemble in other parts of the capital (Amnesty International 1997). After the news of one monk killed during the initial protests, hundreds of monks began to march only to be beaten back by security personnel. Military police were then seen to visit the city's *wats* intimidating, beating young men, and firing shots on temple grounds. At the end of the protests, dozens of Khmers -- including several Buddhist monks -- were believed killed with an

added restriction placed on the city's monks from leaving their temples to collect their daily alms (ibid).

Even though the above events are striking in terms of monastic involvement, they are not necessarily new in the history of the Cambodian Buddhist monastery. Monks have historically been involved in and led resistance movements in the past, and are central to village politics given their perceived impartiality. In January 2003, Tep Vong, Supreme Patriarch of the dominant *Mahanikaya* sect, forbade monks from voting even though their right to do so is protected under the constitution. His actions were due to the arrest of two monks from Wat Ounalom for inciting terror, "I am afraid that demonstrations such as those that broke out in 1993 could reoccur, and if that happens it could generate a lot of factionalism and terror among monks" (Nguyen, http://www.ijfcij.org/folder_file_for_cambodia/7.htm, accessed 15 Aug. 05). On February sixth of that year, 47 year old Buddhist monk, Sam Bunthoeun, abbot of the Phnom Ettarus Pagoda and president of Buddhist Meditation Center of Udong, was gunned down at Wat Lanka in the capital and died two days later. He had actively encouraged monks to register to vote for the National Assembly elections despite Tep Vong's edict (US Department of State 2004).

Tep Vong is, allegedly, pro-CPP and from my interviews with monks at Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite, the CPP enjoys strong support within the monastery's hierarchy due to its continued donations to temples and the schools within them. Both *wats* received large personal donations from Prime Minister Hun Sen for rebuilding efforts and his name is written prominently on a dormitory in Chum Kriel and on the front of Kompong Dtrou Lite's *vihara*. When speaking with monks about politics most

were reluctant (as with the public in general) to discuss the matter and noted that while donations are a good thing they (the *sangha*) were not involved in politics. After a monk at Chum Kriel asked me what I thought about Cambodian politics I responded that I did not talk about the subject much; he smiled and nodded his head knowingly replying, "I think that is better for you [not to speak about the subject]."

Monks are active in various causes such as the *Dhammayietra* peace marches in the early 1990s led by the Venerable Maha Ghosananda (often referred to as the supreme patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism as well as the 'Gandhi of Cambodia') and anti-smoking and HIV campaigns (Etcheson 2004). However, their role as that independent entity feared in the early 1980s has in some measure been diluted through increased government attempts at placing them under its control. This campaign began with the early efforts on the part of officials from the prime minister down showing conspicuous religiosity. The other more pervasive effort seen throughout the countryside is the funding of *wats* as well as the aforementioned personal friendships made with many senior Buddhist clergy. Such personal friendships may not necessarily be out of the ordinary in a kingdom with Buddhism as its state religion. However, these personal connections also have an influence on the amount of autonomy previously enjoyed by the monastery as well as the type of voice monks are able to maintain as a check on unlawful political actions.

Although monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite were more open about the problems facing the country and the corruption found throughout the political system, those at Chum Kriel were less likely to express any overtly negative comments. This was partially due to the *wat's* size and makeup of its *sangha*. Since it drew monks from all

over the province, most of whom were strangers to one another and Chum Kriel village, there was less willingness to be forthright when asked direct questions regarding political elites or other powerful individuals (including former members of the Khmer Rouge). The *wat* was also the seat of monastic administration for the province, received a good deal of political patronage, and was headed by a monk with personal connections to political figures such as the prime minister. Given this situation as well as the lack of a personal connection to the *wat*, monks were apt to remain silent or express their views in private.

Kompong Dtrou Lite also received support from political elites as well as the prime minister, however, the small number of monks and their familiarity with one another and the community ensured them a degree of autonomy in expressing what would otherwise be controversial, or at least less than positive, views of the government. This is not to say that monks at either *wat* were particularly outspoken; both groups (as with most Khmers) tended to be rather silent on controversial issues particularly given the immunity enjoyed by powerful members of the government and military. Yet, the relative distance -- both physical and social -- from urban centres and influential patrons allowed for less verbal restraint. The concept of place, or connection to the *wat* as their 'home', also added to their comfort level when discussing certain topics given the familiarity with the surroundings and villagers who were also less likely to shy away from controversial topics compared to their more urban counterparts. However, as noted, finding *any* Khmer who would openly criticise the government in markedly harsh terms while in the presence of others was a rarity.

In a bizarre twist, a militant pro-government student group with a violent record

has associated itself with the Buddhist *wat*. The Pagoda Children, Intelligentsia and Student Association, commonly known as the "Pagoda Boys", is a pro-CPP group that is registered as an NGO. The group publicly acknowledges receiving money from the prime minister and fashions itself as a youth movement protecting the government against its critics, regularly clashing with protesters at union and student demonstrations (Ana 2003). Demonstrations critical of the CPP government encounter violent counter-demonstrations by the pro-CPP group, attacking and beating people who receive no government or police protection (US Department of State 2004). They were allegedly involved in the anti-Thai riots of January 2003 and have publicly threatened members of FUNCINPEC and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party. Their presence, from all accounts, is mostly centred within the capital where union, human-rights, and student demonstrations normally occur.

The connection between these advances by the government (funding, association, and strong-arm tactics) to reign in the potentially divisive effects of an independent monastery could potentially strip the monastery of its outsider status and mitigate its authority in the countryside. As more and more monks leave the countryside to resettle in Phnom Penh or other urban centres the number of qualified ones left behind has subsequently dwindled. According to current and former monks, after 1997 the number of younger monks serving as abbots has increased. This further hampers doctrinal development as those monks moving to the cities to attend university do not necessarily move back to take on leadership positions within their former *wats*. Monks often say that their reason for leaving the monastery would be for a good job while the reason for attending university would be to put oneself in the position to do so. The

Supreme Patriarch of the smaller and more conservative *Dhamayut* sect, Bour Kry, echoed similar feelings when he lamented the state of Buddhism and that efforts to promote the religion was an "uphill battle" because many monks were "uneducated" while the transmission of Buddhist teachings to the public was also falling short (*The Cambodian Daily* 28-29 May 2004).

The process of re-ordination outlined above is important given the proximity of the *sangha* in relation to the government. Weber wrote of the similarities of both political and religious institutions as members of a routinised administration and the processes whereby they become differentiated from the masses over time (1947). Those within the forefront of a movement are dependent on the notion of time (the point at which they enter the monastery) in order to secure a place within an administration that eventually places them in a higher stratum over relative newcomers (the theory of 'time' will be addressed below; see Gell 1992 for a detailed discussion). However, re-ordination according to time, or one's position in a queue, so to speak, does not address the level of 'good moral character'. Those originally chosen to be the first monks after 1979 were no doubt qualified given their previous length of service. Even so, this does raise issues of legitimacy and right of authority. Those from Vietnam, whether Khmer or Khmer Krom (ethnic Khmers from southern Vietnam) were nonetheless outsiders who had escaped the horrors of the DK regime and were from the same country whose military and advisors were currently occupying Cambodia. How separate from the PRK could they be and to what degree would the general populace accept them as prima facie symbols of Buddhism's return?

I would propose that the real need for Buddhism's return centred not so much on

the Buddhist teachings but on the re-establishment of the more worldly aspects of the faith. These include the position of the *wat* as a community centre, the role of the monastery as a means for social advancement, and the corresponding festivals that serve as units of time marking annual periods of planting/harvesting as well as opportunities for social interaction. While the monastery was reconstructed under difficult circumstances, the need for its secular role (as opposed to its purely religious role) played a more important part in returning the kingdom to 'normalcy' after 1979.

The PRK government may have had other reasons for its delay in the monastery's reconstruction (such as military conscription and potential competition), but the *sangha's* main role centred on reconstructing society through the return of those festivals that regulate the rhythm of the countryside. The vehicle to re-educate the masses needed to come from traditional institutions if the recreation of conventional associations of power and authority were to occur. The need to bring back those associations helped to legitimise the new regime in the eyes of a populace who were attempting to return to a way of life they knew before. Despite the land collectives, loss of personal property, and other socialist measures still enforced, traditional local institutions under the central government's control (who may join, which *wats* can be rebuilt, etc.) could act as a local regulator of popular sentiment while under the occupation of a foreign military.

The new *sangha's* seniority according to the time of ordination and the power and authority accompanying it lends some credence to asking whether a member's 'time' corresponded with their alignment with the PRK. Further, I would argue that their re-ordination was necessary in that having monks from Vietnam established as senior

members *even if Khmer* would not have the same level of accompanying power and authority as recognised by the populace. There is the inherent issue of how deep their authority stretched as it was being, along with the PRK, put in position by a foreign power. To put in place a *sangha* senior to indigenous monks may have undermined their role as leaders and thus depreciated attempts at bringing back that normalcy, vis-à-vis annual Buddhist ceremonies[4].

* * * * *

As seen, while there are many overarching themes and experiences shared by Khmers during the war, there were also different motivations for either supporting the Khmer Rouge or at least accepting the gravity of their actions. While this may partially be due to animosities directed towards other ethnic groups, primarily ethnic Vietnamese, often those who acquiesced to Khmer Rouge tactics did so for self-preservation rather than outright support. Within Kampot, *wats* experienced similar atrocities and the destruction of temples and the monastic community was commonplace.

The re-establishment of the monastery within the province and the country at large, although slow, also reflected the need of the Vietnamese installed PRK government to keep politically influential groups or institutions to a minimum. I believe its restoration was deemed necessary due to the historic role it has played throughout the countryside as well as the necessity for some type of social centre for connecting with society and strengthening the PRK's position as a legitimate government. The

4 None of my informants recounted whether monks who escaped to Vietnam were distrusted. However, the saying of Khmers living in Vietnam having "Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds," (Kiernan 1997 [1996]:3; see also Greenfield and Chirot 1994:121; Andreopoulos, ed. 1994:193, 198; and Gellately and Kieman, eds. 2003:311) as well as rumours that Tep Vong is originally from Vietnam are worth noting.

Vietnamese were international pariahs in the eyes of the West and their invasion of Cambodia, regardless of the stated aims of the Vietnamese, meant that international opinion of *any* government they were to install would more than likely be unfavourable.

The monument building campaign and the importance of 'evidence' can both be related to the reconstruction of the monastery. By presenting the Vietnamese as friends and constructing public memorials housing the remains of victims of the Khmer Rouge, the new government made a very public presentation of bringing Cambodia back to some degree of normalcy. However, in a nation historically tied to Buddhism a genuine demonstration would need to include its traditional institutions and clergy. Yet, the monastery's political voice did pose a threat and any large-scale ordinations would have resulted in a loss of manpower to combat the ongoing insurgency.

While national memorials may have shifted the identities of those lost, local memorials such as those at Wat Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite (the first official, the latter a local manifestation) also represent this shift of identity. Both were visited by groups and individuals on auspicious and non-auspicious days. However, the gifts left for spirits are not 'free' or 'pure' as Malinowski proposed in the Trobriand case (1922:177-180), as they are intended to restore or maintain harmony through appeasing the spirits of those who died in a violent manner. Whereas Chum Kriel's memorial was official it was not as personalised as Kompong Dtrou Lite's where local villagers knew, or at least were fairly certain, that the remains within it were of individuals from the surrounding area.

The re-establishment of the monastery may have been needed politically and socially but to control it meant that the government, both the PRK and current regime,

had to determine in what manner it would exist. As Harris notes, aside from the above motivations for joining the monastery such as attaining merit or for educational reasons, dissatisfaction with the prevailing socio-political order also served as a rationale for many (2001:2). Retaining control over the monastery through aligning modern politics with the Sangha is not unusual for the region; relations between Thai royalty, national *Sangha,* and politics have historically been close while protests by monks in present day Myanmar have brought swift and severe retribution from the country's military junta (Stuart-Fox 2006).

Patronising *wats* such as Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite by government elite and the creation of extra-political entities connects temples, however cursory, with politically influential parties. Violence used against the monastery weakens its role as a voice for reform but it also affects the various roles it has traditionally played. These actions call into question the ability of the monastery to retain an independent voice throughout the countryside and the current government's motivation to allow such a voice to exist. The next chapter will examine the various structures and roles the monastery plays along with the personnel involved in its daily operation. It will also address issues of time and space within Theravada Buddhism and how this relates to the various beliefs within it. Specifically Hindu beliefs and the various folk beliefs and how they in turn determine, to a degree, the perceived spatial sacredness or profanity within a *wat's* grounds and how this relates to the time in which rituals and ceremonies are performed.

5. Structures, Functions, and Lay Personnel Within the Local Wat

The Buddhist *wat* has historically held different roles within Southeast Asian societies: religious, social, political, and educational roles stand alongside its position as a shelter and centre for financial relief. These roles have been central to the stability of villages and the yearly cycle of planting and harvesting which coincides with festivals designed to ensure their success. *Wats* continue to hold prominence for most Khmers in both urban and rural settings and have made a significant resurgence since the end of the war in the late 1990s. Added to this is the *wat's* position as a centre for conflict resolution and rehabilitation in a post-war rural society such as Cambodia. However, this position in rural life is not absolute. As noted above, many young Khmer men within the countryside were unable to enter into the monastery even prior to the 1970s due to financial and/or labour issues (supporting one's family, for example). I have already noted similar circumstances today as expressed by some of my informants. Other informants, however, simply had no desire to become monks or pursue higher education through their local *wat*.

Without an active monastic community the local village is not only left without a centre serving all those roles listed above but also without a centre for mediation and a clergy to facilitate those efforts. I am not suggesting that a 'community' refers to an area with distinct boundaries. Nor am I trying to arrange individuals, villages, and temples in a clean, demarcated superstructure. During my fieldwork, I often found it difficult establishing where one village or commune ended and another began. Many times even

my informants would give conflicting information as to which homes belonged to a given village which were often buttressed against one another. Communes could cover a fairly large area of land as with Kompong Dtrou Lite, or could be smaller with larger concentrations of houses being built on smaller tracts that comprised villages. The latter was seen with Chum Kriel given the lesser amount of land available for cultivation.

My definition of a temple community, or in Khmer, *chomnoh*, is that area within which a *wat* is located and the individuals that interact with the temple at least on a semi-regular basis. Kobayashi defined a temple community as an "unbounded social group, defined by shared participation in the activities of a certain temple" (2008:177). This appears similar to my observations of temple activities and those who participate in them. Some individuals, aside from monks such as *achars* and *don chis*, would be involved on a daily basis while others would visit the temple on the Sabbath or on other auspicious days. Kobayashi went on to describe a given temple's *chomnoh* as fluid with some members patronising several different temples leading it to expand and cover more than one *wat* (ibid 178). This reflected Chum Kriel more than Kompong Dtrou Lite given that the latter was fairly separated from other temples in terms of distance. However, as noted the temple was also well known and did attract people from outside the immediate area.

Don chis normally take on the most responsibilities and are generally the ones who do most of the important chores such as preparing special meals and directing temple-boys or other children in their duties. They also normally take on the responsibility of cleaning the *salaa* and making sure that everything in general runs smoothly. The *don chis* at Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel were always good-

natured and generally treated children in a grandmotherly fashion. Usually they shave their heads, dress in white, and lead very humble lives. However, the shaving of one's head is not a strict rule and one does see *don-chis* from time to time with full heads of hair.

Even though most associate *don-chis* with Buddhist *wats*, women often assume the responsibility for maintaining shrines or the memorials of other traditions. The female lay-specialists attending to the Vishnu statues at Angkor Wat also tend to the Buddhist aspects of the temple as do the men and women looking over the shrine to *Kleung Meun*, a famous Khmer general who sacrificed his own life in battle to defeat the Thais, located in Pursat province (*Kleung Meun* is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven). There is no bright-line between them as Theravada Buddhism as practiced often blends many different traditions together (Evers 1977; Ames 1964). *Don-chis* along with their male counterparts act as gatekeepers for the various traditions throughout the country and can often be seen chanting the Pali sutras alongside *achars* and monks during ceremonies.

Achars have taken on greater roles particularly after 1979, and traditionally held leadership positions outside those held by the Buddhist clergy (Chandler 2000:181; Vickery 1984:179). Can a *wat* exist without monks or, as often is the case, with poorly trained monks yet regain or retain its influential position in a post-war society still coming to grips with the great loss that occurred at the hands of the Khmer Rouge? This is particularly pertinent given that former Khmer Rouge members still walk openly in the streets and only now is there the potential for convictions of top-level members. To answer this question, those traditional roles listed need to be addressed in relation to

larger social issues affecting post-conflict societies.

Such issues have historically varied according to *time* and *space* which in turn govern or have been governed by the relative *profanity* or *sacredness* of a temple or larger belief system. When enjoying the backing of larger political entities local *wats* can often determine the manner in which conflicts are resolved. However, a *wat's* importance within a village and its ability to draw conflicting parties into mediation is only as legitimate as the personnel serving within it. This raises the question of whether a geographical space once housing a *wat* retains its sacredness if the temple is destroyed or whether the space a *wat* occupies is only as sacred as the importance bestowed upon its personnel and the wider belief system.

My interest in the above four variables stemmed from the displacement of a tradition that has been at the centre of Khmer life since the time of the great Cambodian kingdoms. Analyzing them is important in that the longer an ideology is displaced the greater the loss of tradition and ritual and those competent in transmitting knowledge of them. The physical removal of conspicuous symbols of an ideology, or the physical space those symbols occupy, may increase the rate at which tradition vanishes as those symbols and the rituals associated with them also require individual actors to maintain them (Henderson 1982). The destruction, over time, of these symbols and rituals, or the transformation of the physical space they occupy through horrific acts would appear superficially to pollute any sacredness that may be associated with them while increasing the level of profaneness. However, in many ways, those same barbarous acts have created a new form of sacred space and time (such as when and where a ritual can or should be performed). Further, since remains of many victims reside in reconstructed

temples (in some cases in the same temples where the met their fate) this suggests that temples and monks have taken on the respective roles of shrine and interlocutor with sacred victims (remains) of profane wrongdoers (Khmer Rouge cadre).

The corresponding roles the *wat* has maintained/regained have changed given the war but the structures within the local temple also shape these roles according to various beliefs (Buddhist and otherwise). As different parts of the country give greater prominence to certain traditions over others, their respective roles not only define a *wat's* layout but those beliefs which have a significant role within a community. However, the *wat* as an institution for reconciliation is only as potent as the perceived level of sacredness it holds for locals as well as the position allocated to clergy and lay personnel serving within it. Even so, although competency levels within the rural monastic community has meant that some *wats* are more respected than others, a well respected monk can still exert influence even if the *wat* he serves in does not.

Traditional Roles of the Buddhist Monastery

The communal aspects of Southeast Asia, from land tenure to religious rituals, proved advantageous for the planting of Theravada Buddhism amidst local folk traditions while the *sangha* remained distinct from external, indigenous authority (Ling 1979:32-33). Taylor goes on to state this "cultural grafting" of universal onto local traditions helped to foster and legitimise links between India, Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia (1997:297). At the height of Angkor during the reign of Jayavarman VII, this 'grafting' created over 20,000 shrines (Hindu, Buddhist or for local folk deities) and over 300,000 priests and monks (SarDesai 1997:31).

Mulder notes that in Thailand the *wat* and *sangha* act as time-honoured truths of village life defining it as a community much better than arbitrary boundaries (1973:29-30). Establishing a connection with historical connotations ensured that a recognised time-line existed connecting disparate places within a space dominated by a common religion. The nature of the social space a *wat* and village share and the relationship between the local populace and the wider temple has been extended to the ancient city of Angkor Thom, home to the Bayon Temple within the Angkor Wat complex (Miura 2000). Miura's study of the ancient city and its villagers has shown that some trace their origin back to the city's royal court where they have historically had the right to cultivate some of the land within its gates as well as collect forest products (ibid).

Urban centres do have many *wats*, however, they cannot compare with the number found throughout the rural countryside. While not at pre-war levels, the construction of new *wats* and the growth of the *sangha* continues with the help of a relatively stable political peace and economy that has benefited greatly from tourism and the garment industry. The local *wat* is the centre of village life and a point of reference within urban centres. In many ways they also act as the original NGOs of the countryside housing the destitute and transient individual/family who cannot afford to live elsewhere. Even so, *wats* have a dichotomous relationship with the people they serve. On the one hand, a *wat* serves the needs of those religiously minded by providing spiritual and psychological comfort in times of need but they also can also be havens for less than savoury individuals, particularly within cities, who may prey upon unsuspecting people at night. Since they may act as collection points for the destitute, *wats*, while seen as grounds of worship, are also avoided at certain times because of the

perceived and often real danger lurking outside their gates.

Travelling across the Cambodian countryside provides an individual with several views. The first are the omnipresent rice fields stretching as a seemingly endless blanket of subdivided lots. The second is the relative lack of structures and people across the vast openness upon which these fields lie. It is very easy for an outsider to wonder how one could possibly know whose land is where, let alone be able to dutifully take care of it. My informants would tell me that while people have deeds to their land, "people know" which parcel belongs to whom. The last thing that is so striking amidst the green sea of waving rice stalks is the Buddhist *wat* rising from the fields or forest in the distance. The red tile roofs, the ornamental spires, and the characteristic architecture with decorative columns define it as a point of any inhabited area.

It is difficult to accurately point to a typical *wat* aside from some general characteristics. There are some of the most elaborate and large *wats* in the most unlikely places: on top of large hills, in seemingly desolate fields, or in the midst of dense jungle. And then there is the small, homely *wat* amidst busy roads, markets, and urban centres. Troops of young men in saffron robes walking through fields on their way to ceremonies or collecting alms amidst stilted, thatched roofed homes, water buffalos led by small barefoot children, and adults tending their fields add to the picture of a land set in time, unaffected by the outside world. A village's inhabitants appear to go about their business as they have done even before the rise of Angkor. One can easily succumb to those colonial conceptions still echoed in modern travel guides and think that somehow the local *wat* was the original structure around which life slowly grew.

On closer inspection one can quickly see signs of modern life -- radios, electrical

appliances and the car batteries that power them, motorbikes, pre-packaged dry-goods, political party billboards and the like. The idea that the village is an island slowly fades and the concept of a 'timeless' Buddhist *wat* and clergy meeting the needs of the locals takes on a different light as villagers pass in and out collecting water, speaking with friends, attending annual ceremonies, and using the *wat* not so much as a house of worship but a local community centre. Many contain government run primary schools and some young boys live at the *wat* tending to small chores as they learn the precepts and sutras. Young men from the village may spend time there in service as monks before re-entering secular life and the needs of farming while other young people often congregate to look at and gossip about one another during festivals as their parents look on sizing up prospective mates for them.

The *wat* is not so much a static entity but a communal point of reference that allows locals to conduct village affairs or attend to their spiritual well-being. Likewise, the clergy are not mainly attendants to the institution but teachers, advisors, and leaders both in spiritual and secular spheres. To this end the *wat* itself becomes an entity that is not in and of itself powerful but an institution through which power is expressed. It differs in this regard from secular houses of authority in that its power descends from a direct line of politico-religious elites emanating from the king as the supreme defender and representative of Buddhist expression and Khmer identity. A village without a *wat* loses out in this 'power grid', that rural network of intersecting inputs and outputs that encodes and decodes symbols and their meanings within the broader culture.

Similarities in Roles Pre- and Post-War

In her study in 1968, Ebihara also noted that the local monastery acted as centre for numerous social and religious activities. I do not intend to match point for point all the changes in the local *wat* pre and post-war. However, given that her work was completed in the 1960s, it does serve as a useful tool for comparing the changes that have occurred.

As a *moral centre* the *wat* serves the community through rituals and service concentrating on the dissemination of merit to individuals and their acquisition of it through ritual participation (Steinberg 1959:63). One may engage with that 'field of merit' and have the opportunity to create more merit with respect to others which in turn can reinforce the idea of social positioning; one holds a given status as reflected by one's ability to make merit compared to other practitioners (Mulder 1973:6).

The *wat* is also the home of the Buddhist monk. Through him, acting as a mediator and lecturer, people may contribute to their merit cache through supporting the *wat* and attending ceremonies held within it throughout the year. They also support the village as a whole as monks within the *wat* generally come from the local village or wider community surrounding it. In this way, those who enter their children into a *wat* at an early age due to financial concerns actually receive support from their family, friends, and neighbours through the communal aspect of attending ceremonies or other merit-making activities. In this respect, the *wat* indirectly allows locals to help raise a child even though it may not be viewed in such terms.

As a *social centre* the *wat's* above role is heightened since a festival or communal ritual by its very nature requires social engagement. Festivals held

throughout the year may even strike one as lacking in sacredness given the amount of merriment displayed by younger generations. The generation gap between old and young is most obvious here since many of the festivals are acknowledged by villagers as a time when local youths can congregate and participate in games while older adults gossip over which young people would make a good match, talk about the goings on locally or in the capital, or catch up after an absence.

Many things have not changed since Ebihara's work and, perhaps, may never change. Young males stand outside the *salaa* to watch young females and 'look cool' while the latter look on, gossiping in small groups about them. A radio or some larger stereo is usually brought in to play traditional music through worn speakers at what seems like deafening levels, distorting the sound as it travels throughout the countryside. And there are always brightly coloured banners and flags in front of and inside the *wat* along with vendors selling sweets and other party favours. During the New Year, a piñata-like game for young children was held outside the *salaa* of Kompong Dtrou Lite. An individual was blindfolded and spun around several times before being set free to break open the colourfully appointed object with a large stick to release its contents of candy for all to grab.

The *wat* can also hold non-religious celebrations albeit with religious overtones. In the beginning of April there was a party going on at Kompong Dtrou Lite with all the schoolchildren in attendance. A public school teacher at the *wat* said that it was to celebrate the end of classes while a resident monk said that it was to teach the children certain things about Buddhism they would not learn in school. However, the teaching part may have been less formalised than the monk let on; for all intents and purposes it

was the same as any other party for young children. The monks were not participating and in fact were socialising together in front of the abbot's quarters and not too concerned with the goings on of the party. The only real 'Buddhist' part of the event was during the explanation of the symbolism behind the new paintings that were being done within the *salaa*. This was done by the teachers and not by any monks who seemed otherwise indifferent towards the event.

As an *educational centre* the local *wat* has by and large regained its former status. Primary schools are often situated within local temples and staffed by government teachers. Indeed, when I asked Chan, 21, a young monk at Kompong Dtrou Lite if all *wats* had schools he replied, "I've never seen [a temple] without a school." For certain roles the *wat* has maintained its continuity with the past particularly regarding geographically isolated areas where infrastructure outside of a local temple is lacking.

There are facets of the education sector which are similar to Ebihara's study. Illiteracy is high while many who consider themselves literate still have a low comprehension level (ironically, I did know a few Khmers who were more adept at reading English than Khmer). The primary school within Kompong Dtrou Lite was bustling during the school year as one would expect and a very popular place for the children to attend. It does not hold a higher position than other more distant schools, and as with Ebihara's study, it is chosen by parents more for its proximity to their home rather than because it is within a *wat*.

The *wat* acting as a *miscellaneous centre* still holds true and for the most part resembles accounts pre-1970 (or from centuries past for that matter). The *wat* can also provide temporary employment; both Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel had on-

going construction projects. During my stay the former received a generous donation from Khmer-expatriates in the US that was going towards the construction of the abbot's new residence. Also, the local villagers of Prey Thom commune got together to refurbish the *salaa* including new murals depicting various aspects of the Buddha's life and other Buddhist tales. This also ties in with the *wat* as an educational centre since monks and lay members note that the paintings help describe Buddhism and the *dhamma* to those who are illiterate. Ferguson and Johannsen cite similar uses of murals by some *wats* in Thailand as a non-conventional way of teaching through a "Visual Dhamma" approach using art and symbols as objects of meditation (1976:662). Murals not only provide a means of employment but also work as a teaching aid that can further the religiosity of those attending ceremonies (ibid).

As mentioned above, the *wat* also acts as a local shelter as those passing through may be given temporary refuge. I say *may* because the ability to stay at a *wat* is determined by the abbot. Being destitute will not guarantee residence if one is known to be of dubious character. Monks passing through the area may also stay at the *wat*, however, whether they may stay is once again determined by the abbot and the fact that one is a monk does not guarantee a space. That said, several monks travelling through stopped at Kompong Dtrou Lite during my fieldwork. They were normally from within the general area coming back for a visit or staying for a couple of days until they made it to their home *wat*. These monks were always young and many were currently living in Phnom Penh attending either the Buddhist university or a private institution. I never did hear of any monk being turned away during my time there although technically this could happen due to a lack of space or some other logistical problem.

As a *political centre* the current state of the Buddhist *wat* in many respects continues that tradition as a legitimate voice against perceived political wrongs. However, at the same time it is a target of the political establishment. The current government has also used the *wat* to express its policies and present itself as an active participant in Theravada Buddhism. The use of the *sangha* as a legitimising tool of secular political entities is, in some respects, similar to the historic role of the king as *dhammaraja*, the righteous ruler embodying the royal precepts modeled after King Asoka (Swearer 1995:72).

How the *wat* can resolve internal conflicts between local villagers is, to a degree, indicative of larger attempts to put the Khmer Rouge legacy to rest. *Wats* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite have a more legitimate standing within rural communities due to their geographic separation from urban centres and, therefore, urban political institutions. This is also related to a *wat's* size, both in terms of physical makeup and amount of monks residing there at any one time. Larger *wats* are often more elaborate and tend to draw larger crowds for rituals and festivals. This in turn can elicit disdain from some individuals as in the case of Chum Kriel whose monks are considered 'rich' and too close to political elites who patronise the temple more than others. Although Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite was small, it was a popular site for many seeking mediation particularly involving folk spirits such as *neak ta*. Chum Kriel was almost its antithesis and viewed by local villagers as basically a site of monastic administration.

Physical Layout of the Local Wat

The layout of a local temple is fairly similar from *wat* to *wat*. Often they hold places of physical significance -- on the tops of mountains or hills, on islands or large rivers -- and command a relatively large area of ground in relation to other structures. A rural *wat* is usually set back far away from a road but still visible from it and surrounded by fields used for rice cultivation. Whether or not a temple owns fields varies. Historically they did but after the re-establishment of the monastery under the PRK government they were subject to the same collective measures as surrounding villages and any land owned was more than likely confiscated. As the majority of *wats* were destroyed and their *sangha* dispersed or killed, any historic claim to land would have been difficult to prove (a similar situation occurred at Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite following liberation). I did not know of any *wat* in my area of research that retained any previously owned land outside its immediate grounds, however, there may be regional differences.

There is always a small path running from a road or trail through a large gate with the name of the *wat* written on it and accompanied with ornate designs from Buddhist and Hindu mythology. Normally situated on either side of the gate are *nagas* with their five or seven heads glaring from a large hood fanning out on either side of the central face. *Nagas* protect the *wat* (among other things) and are seen on stairway railings or around the *vihara*. Zepp also notes that the spike emanating from the roofs of *viharas* also represents the *naga* adding a further layer of protection to the temple (1997:9). Different *wats* have their own theme regarding *nagas*. The *naga* is very common and originates from a story where the Buddha was protected by a *naga* from a

storm sent by Mara to distract him during meditation (Mara is the demon who tempted the historical Buddha prior to his enlightenment when he was still Siddhartha Gautama).

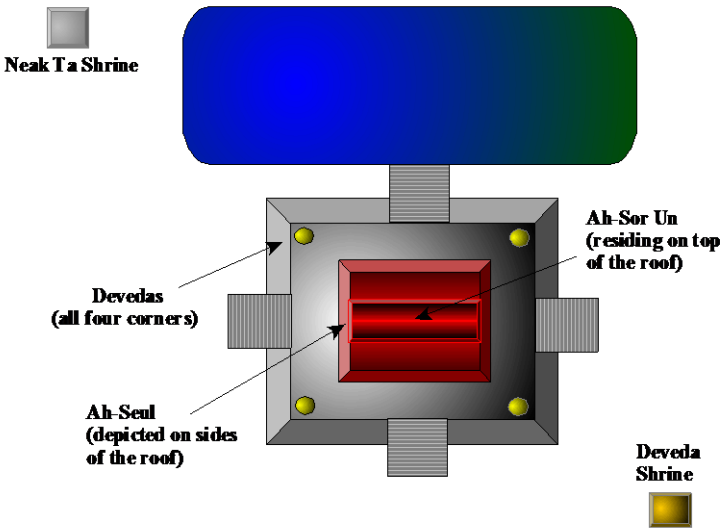
There may also be other deities that have a special significance for a particular *wat* or geographical area. Certain Hindu gods may be present in greater numbers within *wats* around Angkor Wat in Siem Reap province as the sanctuary was originally built as a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu. The air within the great temple hangs thick with the smell of incense, urine, and sweat and is home to local Vishnu cults alongside Buddhist *achars, don-chis*, and monks, the latter having an almost a celebrity status with tourists. The approach to Angkor from the west reflects Vishnu's association with the cardinal direction and while the temple is still highly 'Hindu' it has come to be associated with Buddhism as the nation's official religion. Yet, these varied elements of the Great traditions also intertwine with popular folk beliefs: the large central Vishnu statue at the west end is locally known as *Ta Reach*, a powerful *neak ta* of the region, along with his wife and child (some say a son and daughter) within the same gallery (Miura 2000:15). Three other *neak ta* are said to reside at the other three corners, the southern being *Ta Pech* in the form of an enormous termite hill (the Vishnu statue being long gone) and believed to be somewhat malicious (ibid).

Some gates also have large statues on either side representing *Garudas* or mythical birds in human form which Vishnu rides upon. *Garudas* are also found within the Khmer version of the Ramayana called the *Reamker* and are said to destroy *nagas* or protect them if entered into a pact. *Yakas*, ferocious looking guardians resembling the monkey-god *Hanuman* from the *Reamker* may also be seen at the sides of gates. However, since these larger and more expensive figures may be difficult to come by in

the countryside due to their cost and availability, they and other mythical beings are more often seen within urban *wats* or those holding historical significance.

Structures within the Wat

The spiritual centre of any monastery around which the other structures of a *wat* are organised is the *vihara* or sanctuary. Within the monastery's grounds Chouléan notes that from a ritual standpoint two sacred, successive, and concentric boundaries exist (1988:36). The first defines the *vihara* marked by eight *sima*, Pali for 'boundary', designating the eight intercardinal points represented by stone markers called *leaves* (ibid). These single out the *vihara* as sacred or at least more sacred then the rest of the *wat*. It is also reflected in the architecture of the *wat* along with the placement of *devedas* that may also represent lesser gods at intercardinal points and are often seen flying through the heavens in a *wat's* murals (Zepp 1997: 13). These are normally placed at the four corners of the outer veranda of the *vihara* to protect it from harm:



The second boundary is the remaining territory of the *wat* which is still sacred but does not carry the same sacred weight as the *vihara* (Chouléan 1988:36). It is delineated from the profane village(s) that is further separated from the forest. The grounds in general are rather austere and may also contain one or more small houses generally for other personnel such as *achars*, *don-chis*, or in the case of Kompong Dtrou Lite, one of the primary school's teachers. Whether a *wat* would have any other residences varies but often the larger *wats* have at least one or two buildings that are multi-purpose and serve as either an abbot's office or extra living quarters. Some *wats* have large sheds for pirogues (longboats) which locals may use for the annual boat races during the Water Festival on the day of the last full moon in October or the beginning of November. The pirogues are protected by a *bray* (a particularly dangerous spirit of virgins or women who have died in childbirth) that resides within the boats and protects them from harm. It is attended to by the monks who 'nourish' it regularly (Chouléan 1988:37).

The *wat's* pond is more communal property than *wat* property as it is utilised by villagers from the surrounding area. Although villagers do not ask permission to collect water several informants noted that some people are known to sneak in to the *wat* at night and take fish from the pond without notifying the monks. The monks did not seem to be too upset by this as they know the temple provides basic services and staples for local villagers. Coming from villages themselves, they would not necessarily see anything strange in villagers sneaking in at night to take fish from the pond but I never witnessed villagers doing so during daylight hours (at Wat Chum Kriel a small boy died after falling from a tall tree while attempting to kill a rare type of bird; the abbot

subsequently told people there was not to be any killing of animals on the temple's grounds). However, it would also upset other villagers to see one or several individuals take a limited resource particularly during certain times of year. A poor harvest would put added stress on natural resources within the area and a local temple's supply of water and fish would be a scarce resource as well. Further, those particularly devout members of the laity may react negatively towards such actions that may affect relations within the larger community (being known as a 'thief' is not only bad for social relations but could and often does result in violent retribution).

The *salaa*, or communal hall, is the place where the most activity occurs. This is where meals are eaten, morning and evening prayers are conducted, and meetings between the *sangha* and monks take place -- in general where regular business occurs. Often the *salaa* is one of the nicer structures on the grounds and is where *dhamma* talks and religious aspects of festivals normally take place (the *vihara* is generally used for auspicious occasions). As noted, many *salaas* have elaborate murals of the Buddha's life on the inside walls that serve as teaching guides as well as displaying the names of donors and their corresponding gifts. *Salaas* are cleaned regularly by *don-chis* or temple boys as they are used so frequently especially for the daily breakfast and noontime meals.

Even so, some of the more important and decorative *wats* I have visited did not have *salaas* as nice as some smaller *wats* serving the rural countryside. Wat Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite are good examples. The former is the most important *wat* in terms of monastic bureaucracy in the province and home to over 200 monks as well as the head monk for the entire province. The latter is a rural, countryside *wat*, very small,

and home to six to nine monks depending on the time of year. Yet, the *salaa* at Chum Kriel is rather dilapidated. It is made out of wood instead of cement, contains no murals inside (indeed, the inside was barren) with a rather plain, unpainted exterior and in general looked rather worn. Kompong Dtrou Lite's *salaa*, on the other hand, is made of cement and brick with elaborate murals painted on the inside, the names of donors on the walls, a huge display of Buddha statues and accompanying figures, a tiled floor, and *nagas* at the base and top of the railways of each of the three staircases leading into it.

The difference between the two could rightly be attributed to use; Kompong Dtrou Lite is an active *wat* that genuinely serves the surrounding villages and has a core cadre of lay personnel that actively use and maintain it. It is also a popular *wat* for festivals and consequently requires a nice *salaa* since it is the main centre of activity. Further, the *wat* is a source of pride for villagers and they in turn want to have and maintain nice structures. Chum Kriel is more of an administrative *wat* that often seems to exist for the sole purpose of the Buddhist high school. While many live immediately outside the temple it is nonetheless considered a 'rich' *wat* by the locals as it is the recipient of a good deal of money from government officials. Because of its 'rich' status it often does not have large crowds during festivals as *wats* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite. Further, as its *salaa* is not used that often it does not receive the same attention as more rural *wats*. The key points and differences between the two *wats* will be discussed in greater detail below.

The *vihara* is the most important structure on temple grounds. It is the centre of religious devotion and showcase for the surrounding area. Villagers take great pride in its construction and many donate money, when possible, for its completion. However, it

is not necessarily used that often. Many times the *salaa* is used as a defacto place of worship leaving the *vihara* for special occasions such as for festivals or private devotion. Even so, its sanctity is not absolute. Children can be seen playing around or even within it although it is often locked for fear of theft of the many ornamental statues usually contained therein. The outside of the *vihara* normally has a staircase leading up onto its outer walkway which may have ceremonial stupas (while the Khmer word for stupa is *chedey* it was never referred to as such by monks but always as either stupa or *dagoba*; for convenience sake I shall use stupa from this point on). The base of the railings have *nagas* facing outward and perhaps one at each corner of a railing's outer perimeter. There may also be a small shrine for the *devedas* at each of the corners as previously noted.

The front, sides, and rear of a *wat's* roof have detailed carvings often with depictions of beings from Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as Khmer animism. One such figure is *Ah-Seul*, a being that lives in paradise and is only seen in the *vihara*. According to my monk informants it has nothing to do with Buddhism but is part of the Khmer animistic spirit world. On the very top of the temple lives *Ah-Sor-un*, 'chief' of *Ah-Seul*. While monks were not sure as to their specific function they noted that along with other entities they protected the entire *wat* and specifically the *vihara*. Evers cites similar local expressions of Hindu deities within temples throughout Sri Lanka: the *vihara* housing both images of the Buddha and deities either in separate shrines or within the sanctuary itself (1968:543).

The names of spirits said to occupy the grounds of a *wat* may vary according to individuals and regions. I enquired about the name of *Ah-Seul* with several young men

in their early twenties from an urban environment, none of whom had ever served in the monastery but were still knowledgeable about Buddhism. None of them knew the name of *Ah-Seul* but did mention a different name, *Ah-Sor-e-Kay*. This spirit is supposed to live within the *vihara* and surrounds the main Buddha statue housed within. If an individual walks alone at night within the temple grounds it will take the form of an animal or a ball of light that shoots around in different directions to ward off trespassers. When asked about the difference between the two names, Chuy, 25, who worked in a local noodle shop in Kampot town responded, "Sometimes the same word in Cambodian…I don't know -- a young man knows a different one from an old man." My monk informants also knew of *Ah-Sor-e-Kay* but were not sure of its specific function other than that it protected the *wat* alongside the other entities described above.

Certain spirits may have specific functions within the village that are not needed or are unimportant in other areas such as urban centres that do not depend on agriculture as their main source of employment. The difference between the young, urban men of similar age who never have served as monks and monks in a rural setting would seem to hinge on monastic service and geographic location. Monks will logically come to know more about certain functions and spirits within a *wat* than those who have never served in the monastery. As many local folk spirits have a direct relation to the land, weather, and harvests it is understandable that those not connected with farming would not be as knowledgeable about them or their respective roles. However, as the monks did not know the functions of many of the entities either, it suggests that certain aspects of the religion are accepted as part of the wider Khmer cosmology and serve a purpose even if separate from doctrinal Buddhism.

What *Ah-Seul* possibly represents is a figure called *Rahu* from ancient Khmer mythology. *Rahu* is of Brahmanic origin and described in more detail below. He is often seen on the gates to a *wat* and can be traced to pre-Angkor temples as well as monuments in Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Zepp 1997:13). This may explain the confusion as to certain functions and duties of images on different parts of a temple. While entities such as *Rahu* may be known by a different name between regions and individuals, they can still reside within popular Khmer cosmology maintaining similar functions and duties.

The amount of ornamentation inside a *vihara* varies but most tend to have 'teaching murals' similar to the *salaa* depicting stages of the Buddha's life as well as other popular tales. Often there is also a depiction of hell in graphic detail with its suffering victims and the types of torture they endure. Many also contain depictions of deities other than Buddha; Vishnu is a common example as are other Hindu gods. Often Hindu gods are depicted with blue faces while the *devedas* are seen flying through heaven (Zepp 1997:13). Another god depicted often is *Preah Ahn,* a god with four faces each looking in different directions resembling the giant carved faces of the Bayon temple at Angkor. The identity of *Preah Ahn* has been said to be that of the Hindu gods Indra and Siva, as well as the leader of all *devedas*.

Within every *vihara* are numerous Buddha statues surrounding a large central one. It is set at the front of the sanctuary upon a dais and made out of metal. As so many statues were destroyed or stolen during the DK regime those of historical importance are limited. Donations from other Theravada countries, specifically Thailand, have helped to remedy this as has restoration money donated by Khmer expatriates. Aside from the

murals and dais the *vihara* is empty. Any other ornamental designs are strictly up to the *sangha* and dependent on donations and government funds. Some *wats*, though, managed to retain certain furnishings from before the war; the *wat* in Pursat by the *Kleung Meun* shrine housed an ancient bronze relief said to have been pre-Angkorian. It was hidden by fleeing members of the *sangha* as the Khmer Rouge made their way into the region. I have come across other such artefacts at *wats* throughout the country but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule. As the majority of *wats* were either destroyed or stripped thoroughly most historic pieces have been lost for good.

The final typical structure found within the *wat* is the *neak ta* shrine (*taub*) housing the resident folk spirit generally located in the northeast corner of the grounds (Chouléan 1988:36). A relatively new *wat* may not have its own *neak ta* but may take on a *neak ta* that resides within a nearby village. Other *wats* may have a *neak ta* shrine immediately adjacent to the *vihara* or at least close by; the former was seen in Kompong Thom province, the latter south of Kep. Chouléan describes their powers as limited to the *wat's* grounds (ibid) and my research supports the same conclusion. However, when asked about the most powerful *neak ta* in Prey Thom Commune some of my monk informants would state that the *neak ta* of Kompong Dtrou Lite was the most powerful even though it was limited to the *wat* itself. Others would concede that they were not sure or mentioned the prowess of the most powerful *neak ta* in the area, *Yeah Mao*. Non-monk informants often deferred to *Yeah Mao* as well. The folk spirit is well known in Cambodia and is said to occupy the mountains in the village of Kep as well as nearby in front of King Sihanouk's former residence overlooking the Gulf of Thailand.

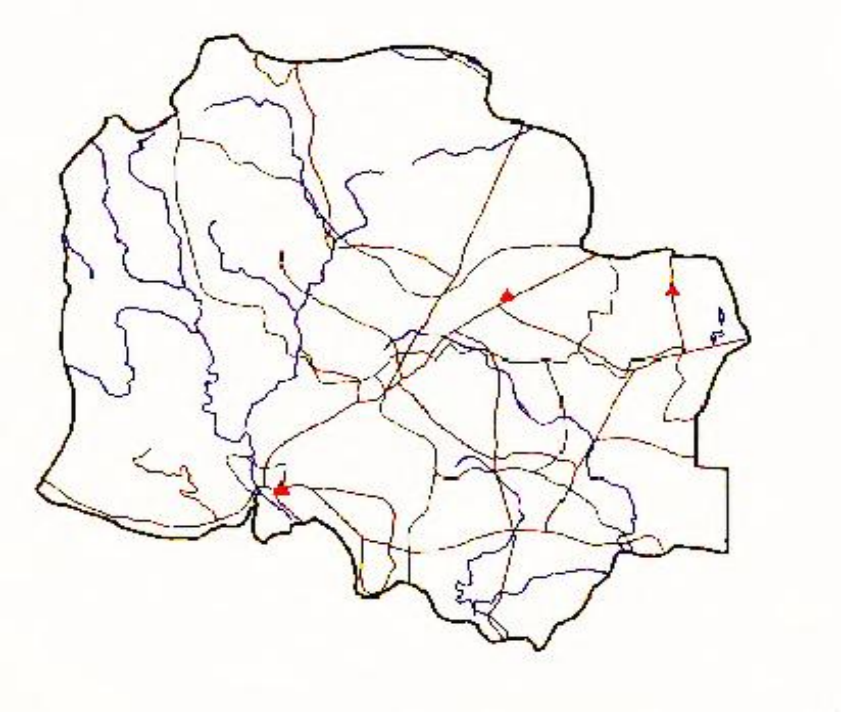
One of the most obvious differences between *neak ta* and the rest of the *wat* is

the condition the shrine is kept in. While the rest of the shrine is kept clean and refurbished when funds allow, the shrine to *neak ta* is often in a state of disrepair. Many shrines are simply kept within a drab cement or wooden structure and lack the same attention to detail afforded the rest of the temple. In many ways it seems to have been forgotten by the rest of the community standing on the *wat's* outskirts. As noted above, monks and non-monks often referred to *neak ta* as Cambodia's 'first' religion as its shrine stands almost as a hollow shell with a small bowl of sand for incense candles or a small container for other offerings. As it is generally out of sight, this may explain its outward appearance.

However, *neak ta* (and other spirits) are often associated with nature and many times reside outside of villages along with other spirits such as *bray* described below. Interaction with it can also be a very personal experience. While there are collective *neak ta* rituals that take place during times of need (droughts or floods, for example) often such things as illness are remedied by offerings and prayers to *neak ta* and not necessarily through Buddhist offerings which centre more on merit for the future. The appearance of a *neak ta* shrine, therefore, often reflects its role of serving the individual. Yet, it is nonetheless connected tangentially to the public display of Buddhism away from the perimeter where the shrine normally resides.

Lastly, there is the presence of shrines made up of the bones of victims of the Khmer Rouge. They are prevalent throughout the countryside to the point that coming upon one within a *wat* is of no surprise. Both Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel had similar shrines. The former was a mere collection of bones stacked within a shed built immediately east of the *vihara*. The latter's is one of the officially recorded

memorials scattered throughout the country (Wat Chum Kriel is the red triangle located in the southwestern portion of the map; Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite is not shown):



(1996 *Cambodian Genocide Sites, Kampot province, Recorded Memorials*, Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University Mapping Component, University of New South Wales, Sydney)

Since *wats* were used as storage centres, prisons, and execution sites (Hughes 2004:279) yet continue to act as the centre of village life, memorials, both official and local, are often located within them housed in separate shrines. As noted in the previous chapter, the *Choeung Ek* memorial stupa, the site of the 'killing fields' for victims of the S-21 prison, is the largest and most notable of these shrines. A monk from Trapeang Sva village of Kandal province noted that he built a small memorial in 1999 because if the bones "Continued to lie in the state they were in they would certainly vanish and no

evidence would be left for younger generations to see. In addition, if Buddhist followers wanted to come to light incense and pay homage to commemorate the souls of the dead, there was not a place for them to do so" (Cougill, http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Buddhist_Cremation_Traditions.htm, accessed 11 July 05).

The idea of evidence was thus on the minds of others as well and from this particular monk's remarks seemed to be his primary motivation for collecting them. Similar sentiments were expressed to me with regard to the memorials at Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel. The abbot at the former was distressed to see the bones lying about and picked away by animals and took on the construction project himself. Chum Kriel's memorial, being more elaborate given the temple's status, was constructed as an official site but did not retain the personalised connection with the surrounding villages as with Kompong Dtrou Lite (I witnessed several separate ceremonies at Kompong Dtrou Lite's shrine but none at Chum Kriel's).

Time and Space within Theravada Buddhism

While it is true that some aspects certainly seemed fixed within the confines of a village there is always the inevitable change from outside elements that in turn deviates the course of cultural progression, however so slightly, affecting its broader trajectory. The DK regime's time in power is the most obvious example of this, however, the regulating quality of the local *wat* in influencing or controlling the fluctuating rhythm of the countryside has historically helped maintain stability for rural, yet dispersed communities. The re-establishment of a viable religious order needed the accompaniment of a physical *space* for worship and for the process of reconstructing the

sangha's role as a traditional seat of power and regulator of village life. Reconstruction was dependent on the demonstration of *time* as a means for the *sangha* to secure its place in the countryside once again. By invoking that notion of 'timelessness' a re-established monastery could demonstrate its right to exist by virtue of its inherent space and importance it occupied within Khmer culture prior to its forced removal under the Khmer Rouge. Their attempt to create 'Year Zero' and begin time anew required the destruction of those culturally ingrained institutions of authority that posed a threat to their claim to power and that they be severed from the time-line of Khmer history.

Durkheim demonstrated early on how views of time, causation, and space differed among disparate people and were not constrained solely by nature (1915 [1912]). Further, his analysis of the *sacred* and *profane* aspects of religion examined how the sacred is isolated and protected from the profane by entities charged with ensuring its separation (ibid 56). Malinowski's Functionalist approach, however, saw a long running conversation with the past which cannot be 'seen' and must, therefore, be explained in terms of the present (Malinowski in Bloch 1977:278), while Evans-Pritchard's "oecological time" recognised time-reckoning concepts that convey "social activities" and "relations between activities" (1940:95-110). Gurvitch went further in his analysis developing scales of time comprising enduring, deceptive, erratic, cyclical, retarded, alternating, advancing, explosive, and ecological time (1964: 31-3, 40). Although we can analyse activities within religious centres such as a temple or *wat* in terms of a conversation with the past vis-à-vis interlocutors charged with maintaining lines of communication, the time spent in that conversation may not represent a smooth transition from the profane to the sacred. Instead, time may divide itself into

differentiated scales. Goody, on the other hand, demonstrated that all societies have some sort of mechanism for measuring time such as religious or political systems, for example (1991 [1968]:3). We can add to these agricultural systems which act as another measurement of time or ask whether such systems, in a Cambodian context, are merely part of broader religious and/or political schemes.

Within a Khmer context, agriculture has historically been influenced via the local *wat* and the annual rituals governing the planting and harvesting of rice. This is similar to Bloch's analysis of time as two ideologically motivated entities, "ritual time" and "mundane time", influenced by universal observation of the environment (1977). Carrying this further, Fraser saw the hierarchical perception of time organised along increasingly complex structures and processes that remain open-ended (1986). While Buddhist and folk rituals, like other rituals, are calendrical in nature and have a similar organisation hierarchy, one could argue that given their fixed limits in duration and when and where they can be performed they cannot adequately be described as open-ended.

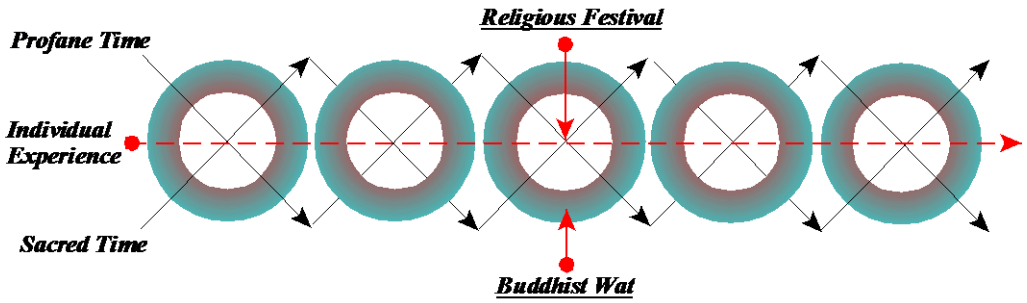
In an archaeological view of time, "substantial time" relates to past social actions as they are interpreted in the present (Shanks and Tilley 1987). Likewise, the previous actions of historical figures such as those who have died in battle are re-interpreted today by those seeking good fortune or relief from harm. Holtorf's study of the life-histories of megaliths (1996) demonstrated how time is constructed and invented by societies within the given space they inhabit. Bollnow's anthropology of space suggests humans perceive and organise their environmental space in polar relations as conceived of within human settlements (in Egenter, N. 1999). This influenced Norbert-Schulz's

concept of "existential space" and its ramifications on architectural space (1972:15-16). One ramification of the construction of the irrigation works and the failure to maintain them, as has been suggested, could have lead to the decline of Angkor (Chandler 200:78). Stupas can be another example of this "existential space"; the placing of one's stupa within a prominent *wat* is an important consideration for many and can be a reflection of their status within their community.

Still other studies have focused on the incorporation of cyclical and linear conceptions of time and space fulfilling different functions in different contexts. Munn stressed that we and our productions are always 'in' time while our actions and the space they take place within simultaneously create that same time (1992:100, 94). However, Bourdieu's focus on the agent viewed pre-capitalist economies as encouraging foresight of the immediate future implicit in the present space they occupy, while capitalist economies viewed the future as a spatial field of possibilities explored through calculation (in ibid 106). Yet, through the "ritual manipulation of time" (Gell 1992:32) agents attempt to restructure time through repetitive ritual. Rather than dividing time into the sacred and profane, agents adjust their own place within ongoing, yet separate, time frames.

According to Durkheim, a hierarchy existed between the sacred and profane resulting in "a certain number of sacred things" sustaining a relationship "of co-ordination or subordination" with others defining proper behaviour through their accompanying rituals (1915:56). When one enters into either sacred or profane spheres, the time at which appropriate behaviour is to occur begins. The duration of this time is dependent upon the individual and their level of religiosity as well as what is deemed

appropriate by others engaged in similar religious practice (such as monks and members of the *sangha*). Intervals of 'sacred time' exist within the 'sacred space' of the Buddhist *wat* governed by the annual cycle of festivals which regulate and are regulated by agricultural and monsoonal seasons. Participation within a festival represents the displacement of 'ordinary' time through the regeneration of 'mythical' or sacred time. This aspect of time is reconstructed every time a sacred event occurs within a designated space thus recreating its primordial origin (Eliade 1961:69-72).



The above diagram demonstrates the intersection of profane and sacred time, while the dotted line shows an individual's experience. The dotted line, as opposed to a solid one, represents the difference in that experience as no two individuals will interpret phenomena in similar ways. Profane and sacred time intersect within the space of the *wat* during religious festivals; individuals, existing in the everyday world of the profane, experience this intersection during those festivals. However, merely entering into the space of a *wat* does not mean one will experience this junction. Participation is required in order to bring that experience into actualisation. Yet, profane time, is 'regular' or 'festal' time that is linked to one's own life with a limited duration. Just as past events in an individual's life continually become more distant in time, future events continually

become closer (McTaggart in Good 2000:279)[5].

While events and things have 'duration', the totality of an event is only recognised when their entire duration is considered (Good 2000:279). The totality of sacred time is, therefore, experienced within the space set aside for the local *wat*. It is within this context that the individual steps into the sacred through his or her interaction with the 'timeless' festival that in turn recreates a moment that ebbs and flows according to calendrical cycles (agricultural or monsoonal, for example). However, the timelessness of a festival is only discerned upon its completion, or in other words, when its entire duration is experienced.

The space a *wat* maintains is, therefore, sacred and fixed maintaining a central axis within a profane plane. According to Shiner, Eliade's interpretation postulates a break in undifferentiated space in relation to the centre that acts as an *axis mundi* creating an opening between cosmic planes thus creating a world at the horizontal and vertical points of reference repeating the act of creation (1972:426). For the Buddhist *wat* this axis mundi is properly represented as Mt. Meru, the centre of the cosmological universe. The re-creation of Mt. Meru occurs architecturally within the *wat* and stupa and symbolically through the numerous rites with their adjacent offerings in the form of a small mountain. This raises the question of when does sacred time begins within a ritual and at what point does the profane cease. The architectural or physical

[5] Edwards (2007) described the separation of the sacred and profane aspects of ritual as the work of European preoccupations with religious authenticity and national specificity. Many would argue that local perceptions of rituals are more important than etic perspectives. While I am not attempting to analyse ritual at the expense of Khmer attitudes nor attempting to define what is and is not part of Cambodian Buddhism (given that different beliefs are expressed on a more regional basis than a national one), I do believe that emphasizing certain characteristics of ritual is important as the inclusion of such a large number of skeletal remains has helped to augment the role of local folk beliefs.

representation of a sacred mountain would presuppose a field of ongoing sacred time within the temple grounds while the symbolism of materials and offerings used for a ritual suggests the commencement of that time when presented with key ingredients. However, offerings in the form of a sacred mountain are not necessarily required for a festival to begin but their presence reinforces the concept that sacred time (for rituals) requires a sacred space (either a *wat*, stupa or other material representation) for the re-creation of primordial origins as described by Eliade (1961).

Profane time must exist then as 'default time' only to be interrupted by the sacred via ritual activities. The motivation behind rituals and the expectation and means of attaining desired effects require us to ask who benefits and how they determine their actions are cosmologically justified. While situated within a sacred state that is separate from the profane, an individual is relieved from certain requirements of the everyday yet takes on new duties related to their position within the new temporal/spatial domain they occupy.

* * * * *

Wats are not merely places where monks reside and merit-making activities take place but are centres of rural life where individuals engage the supernatural through ceremonies and interact with the varying and disparate elements that comprise Khmer cosmology. They define village life and the relationships individuals have with their fellow villagers as well as the broader environment which is home to numerous spirits that complement and compete with canonical Buddhism. Shifting roles throughout the countryside which have affected these relationships may appear to be obligatory given the violent shifts in rural life before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge regime. Often

these shifts have directed the re-institutionalisation of the *wat* and monastic community and the manner in which ritual is implemented. This implementation raises larger issues of *time* and *space* and the manner in which the local *wat* and village monks act as institutions and agents of mediation. The time individuals enter into during mediating rituals is intricately linked to the space those rituals are conducted in. Segregating time according to the perceived profaneness or sacredness of a ritual and the space they are performed in is further dependent upon those religious specialists conducting the ceremony. While the quantity of competent monks has been improving there is a drain from the countryside to urban areas of well educated monks leaving younger and less experienced monks to take on leadership positions they may or may not be ready for.

Post-war rehabilitation of the monastery will continue to depend on older lay personnel to aid in the training of monks and younger generations as well as acting as go-betweens with the monastery and larger village in extra-monastic services such as life-cycle or annual harvest ceremonies. Within Kompong Dtrou Lite, an *achar's* traditional role as an overseer of festivals and rituals strengthened village participation since the *achars* were local residents. Likewise, the monks were dependent upon *achars* and *don chi*s for guidance and help with cooking and cleaning as well as directing younger temple boys in their duties. Therefore, on an administrative level monks may superficially appear to be spiritual caretakers whereas the actual running of the *wat* is left to others.

However, societal reconciliation remains an ongoing issue within the country, particularly now as Khmer Rouge tribunals of top-level cadre are being conducted. Harris (2001) notes that while the monastic order throughout the country is not

necessarily united, the senior ranks of the Cambodian *sangha* are in agreement over the primary reasons for accountability and support the goal of reconciliation if done in a culturally sensitive way. What remains on the local level is personal reconciliation. The resiliency of folk beliefs contributes to resolving individual conflicts such as illness but also interpersonal disputes. This too is connected to the sacredness and profanity seen in a *wat's* layout; local *neak ta* shrines are often in the northeast corner of the temple grounds away from other structures. The profaneness of the forest decreases in potency vis-á-vis Hindu deities/beliefs and Buddhism the closer one gets to the *wat*. However, folk beliefs are still incorporated within the temple grounds, serving the needs of villagers which Buddhism does not. How this relates to Khmer cosmology and monastic tradition after its reconstruction and its reflection in the various ceremonies throughout the year will be addressed in the next chapter. The relevance of folk beliefs as they relate to Buddhist rituals along with a further discussion of the economics of merit will also be covered in greater detail.

6. Ceremony and the Merit Economy

A journey throughout the Cambodian countryside provides a glimpse into a way of life that, but for the upheaval seen throughout the latter half of the 20th century, has in many ways remained constant for centuries. *Wats* occupy the landscape and monks can be seen tending to their daily duties as they have throughout Khmer history. So too have the ceremonies that occupy the Khmer calendar and the importance many ascribe to them. While monastic service still continues, as noted, the quality of monastic training is understandably less than that of other Theravada Buddhist nations, most notably Thailand and Sri Lanka. These two nations have contributed to the redevelopment of the monastic order by sending senior monks to train Khmer males particularly in the wake of not only a loss of senior Khmer monks but also an extensive monastic literary tradition.

Although rules and observances have not changed, adherence to them varies according to the individual and their personal motivations. Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and Wat Chum Kriel offered contrasting views of service given their respective roles within the national monastic system, number of monks residing within them, and their proximity to urban centres. *Wats* such as Chum Kriel differed in the motivations expressed by monks as well as the level of participation by the local community in the various festivals and ceremonies put on throughout the year.

However, Buddhist practice and communal participation in ceremonies and festivals also relates to the physical space the *wat* maintains as noted in the previous chapter. Regaining this physical space is dependent upon the respective roles employed

by the *wat* and the community's acknowledgement of those roles. In other words, the physical space is related to the abstract space a *wat* maintains within the cosmology employed by its patrons. Issues of time also arise regarding a monastery's competency, such as the skill-set of certain monks (the ability to recite sutras, conduct festivals, etc.). Monks who had served prior to the DK regime, such as the abbot of Kompong Dtrou Lite, are consulted more often than younger, more inexperienced monks for Buddhist and folk ceremonies. This in turn can affect the status of a *wat* (i.e., greater communal participation) as well as the relevance of other beliefs (such as folk beliefs and Hindu deity worship). Even so, this is not necessarily true for all *wats*. Chum Kriel had competent monks but was not as popular with locals due to its status as a 'rich' and more administratively oriented temple.

Participation in ceremonies and festivals not only helps maintain communal connections but also validates the role of *wats* which may differ in size and location. This in turn has an effect on merit-making activities and the likelihood that individuals will participate according to the perceived usefulness of ceremonies, especially those that are designed to influence weather patterns and agricultural conditions. How these relate to other religious traditions aside from Buddhism varies according to the individual and region. Yet, while merit-making activities appear at times to be an individual affair, the collective benefit of material distribution which is catalysed by the desire for merit can also bring about an increase in a temple's (and village's) status. However, this too is differs according to context, *wat*, and the monastic cadre therein. Material and financial distribution reaffirms a temple's status within a village and validates the inclusion of beliefs and rituals outside of canonical Buddhism. Although

peripheral, these beliefs form part of a triad through which Khmer cosmology is formed. These issues and the role various traditions play in popular rituals as they relate to the *wat's* re-established position within the countryside and the financial rationale for merit-making activities will be addressed below.

Festivals, Ceremonies, and Life Cycle Rituals

***Bon Chul Ch'num*: Khmer New Year**	***Bon Visak Bochea*: The Buddha's Birthday**	***Bon Ch'rat Preah Nongkol*: Royal Ploughing Ceremony**	***Bon Ch'ul Vassa*: First day of Buddhist Lent**	***Prachum Benda (Bon Pchum Ben)*: Festival of the Dead**	***Bon Katun*: End of Buddhist Lent**	***Bon Om Touk*: Water Festival**
Mid-April, three days	**Mid-May, one day**	**Late-May, one day**	**Mid-July, two days**	**September-October, 15 days**	**October - November, one month**	**Mid-November, three days**

The following is not an in-depth account of all the Buddhist festivals practiced throughout the year but an overview of their importance to local villagers and the interplay of *power* in local expressions of religion and the relative *identity* ascribed/assumed by monks and *wats* in different ritual contexts. The major (and minor) festivals mark the time and agricultural cycles, act as a social event for young and old, and reassert Buddhism's role within village life. They are also times when monks are allowed a greater degree of status and recognition even by non-religious individuals. While the Buddhist Sabbath, or *T'ngai Seul*, is routine, other festivals such as *Pchum Ben* and *Katun* occur only once a year and can bring large numbers of individuals from near and far to local temples. The draw of the local *wat* as a social centre for the devout is also acknowledged by the non-devout who may still want to take part in the secular aspects of festivals. Festivals and ceremonies allow a respite from farming or other

occupations as well as allowing families and friends to reconnect and gossip about local goings-on or see who may be an eligible suitor for whom.

Several factors need to be taken into consideration when discussing the importance of Cambodian ceremonies. There is a large gap, not only generationally but symbolically, in a ceremony's expression. The symbolism of many events was absent for an entire generation (possibly two) prior to King Sihanouk's re-establishment on the throne following the 1993 elections and the formation of the Royal Cambodian Government. It would be surprising if the same significance is placed on certain ceremonies by people who did not participate in, much less witness, them for so many years. The fact that villagers may not know certain aspects of various ceremonies or their historical importance should not be surprising given the relatively low level of education and high illiteracy rate. Many come to know of events parenthetically and not in the traditional forum of the village school and *wat* where Khmer traditions and proper etiquette towards Buddhism and Buddhist monks have traditionally been taught. The cultural loss in Cambodia, both in terms of the *sangha* and literature, compounds the difficulties in fully re-establishing the meaning behind Buddhist rites to the extent they held pre-1975.

The level of cultural loss, though difficult if at all possible to quantify, and the level of importance given to certain traditions depends largely on the transmission of such knowledge by those privy to it. Annihilating groups with in-depth academic knowledge (intellectuals) denies future generations access to analysis of the historical basis or importance of customs that may be taken as matter of fact by populations that have practiced those customs by way of habit. This is not to say that rural populations

lack the capacity or entrenched in-depth knowledge of customs but when addressing the situation from 1975 on (or even before) the record is clear. There was the loss of knowledgeable elders due to physical/environmental conditions and a loss of intellectuals, religious and educated classes through death or displacement (Vickery 1984).

After 1979, the policies set by an administration installed by the Vietnamese Communist government (albeit one that allowed the return of limited traditions) continued a communal economy with controlled migration and military conscription to fight an ongoing insurgency (Curtis 1998:123). While Khmers were jubilant to see the end of the DK regime, there still remained many who firmly believed in Khmer Rouge propaganda and fought for it as well as a younger generation 'lost' to this ideology that needed reintegration into a working civil society (Ea and Sim 2001). The need to address the concerns of such a human disaster required the population to again be mobilised and rebuild itself, meaning that tradition had to take a back seat to the immediate needs of the people.

Some festivals have been superimposed upon the landscape such as the Chinese New Year or *Cheang Meng* when those of Chinese descent go to specially constructed grave mounds made of sand to pray for their ancestors (people also go at other times such as right before Khmer New Year). As with Khmer festivals, its practitioners hope to bring money, good luck, and happiness through their prayers and offerings, cleaning and dressing the graves with ribbons in anticipation of the *deveda* of the New Year. For many, ceremonies -- regardless of their origin -- are a chance to see relatives, attend their local *wat*, or go to Phnom Penh. The level of Chinese ancestry is relatively unimportant

as people of mixed parentage often identify themselves as either outright Chinese (especially if their father is of Chinese descent) or at least Chinese-Khmers.

Participation in ceremonies normally identified with other ethnic groups often does not require cultural competence (speaking the language or knowing the customs, for example) but self-identification and association with that group. This "symbolic ethnicity" or nostalgic allegiance to another (Gans 1996) may also exist only as a "state of mind" and not in everyday practice (Bakalian 1991:13). As one increases or decreases one's affiliation according to context (Nagel 1994:154), participation in ceremonies traditionally labelled 'Chinese' becomes part of the broader social construction of identity linked to other ethnic identifiers such as occupation and location. Within Southeast Asia, ethnic Chinese have traditionally lived in urban centres and held certain occupations outside of farming, such as in business or banking (McCloud 1995:298, 321). When I was in need of materials, my informants would tell me to speak with the "Chinese in the market" regardless of whether they actually knew what their ethnicity was.

This emic and etic perspective of identity tends to act as a catalyst for individuals to acknowledge certain rituals which in turn open further avenues for attaining 'luck' and even merit that may be denied to other groups. However, usurping traditions and incorporating them into a wider cosmology has historically been the case in the region (as elsewhere) and exclusion from one group in terms of descent does not necessarily mean that other groups will refrain from participating in 'non-Khmer' ceremonies. Dan, 29, the former soldier noted above who fought against the Khmer Rouge, described this process well when speaking about another Chinese holiday, *T'ngai San Lo Ky*,

incorporated within the Khmer calendar:

> Dan - You know, old people go.
>
> O'Lemmon - Young people?
>
> Dan - Yeah, young people. *Kmai (*Khmer) people go to pray and bring fruit for their grandparents (ancestors) for good luck. Many people go. *Kmai* people really like it.
>
> O'Lemmon - But isn't it a Chinese holiday?
>
> Dan - Well, *Kmai* people use it. Yeah, it's Chinese but *Kmai* people go to the pagoda.
>
> (Interview, Kampot province, 28 Sept. 04).

While many Khmers used this 'Chinese' ceremony (or indeed, any holiday) as a means for extra-religious activities, its inclusion within the *wat* as a vehicle for ritual was distinct from the major 'Khmer' ceremonies marking seasonal and agricultural transitions.

Even the lesser Buddhist festivals are obvious throughout the countryside as brightly coloured flags representing the colours of the Buddhist flag wave in front of a *wat's* entrance. Making 'sand-hills' is a common Khmer tradition held around the Khmer New Year particularly on the New Year's third and final day when villagers go to their local *wat* to honour their ancestors. The hill is first sprinkled with water then placed in various locations depending on a *wat's* tradition. The hill represents one's sins but also acts as a means of circumventing an otherwise poor afterlife. As an individual cannot lie to *Vis-ah One-ton* (also known as *Yama* in Buddhism), the god of hell, building a mountain represents their wish to escape death; the amount of sand represents the number of people you have hurt. Or as one young monk from Battambang put it, "If you kill 100 chickens, you die 100 times."

Measuring roughly one-third square metres, the hill (which may also resemble a

pyramid) is said to be made of numerous ‘sand cones’. If *Vis-as One-ton* cannot guess how many ‘sand-cones’ are in one’s sand-hill, one will escape hell and be reborn. As a type of safety-net for the individual (and their ancestors) its fundamental purpose is to ease the transition of a person’s soul through the afterlife. This is particularly important during the New Year when the next *deveda* ushers in a chance to have a clean slate. Performance of the act is what is important, more so than producing an adequate representation of one’s (or another’s) sins. As such, it reflects Marett’s analogy that religion is not so much thought out as it is “danced out” (in Stringer 1999:7). Physical performance is demonstrable of an individual’s commitment to the ritual while also reasserting bonds of social cohesion with the rest of the *sangha*.

Approaching the entrance of a *wat* one is met by the sound of traditional music emanating from poorly wired speakers as its xylophonic rhythms crackle faintly with electronic interference. The young and old come and go while the core *sangha* members can be seen in their best clothes straightening up the *salaa* for the lunchtime meal. Children (normally at home, away from school) are brought by their parents (mostly mothers) to listen to the *dhamma* while young men stand towards the rear of the *salaa* trying their best to look aloof as young women gossip about them. Banners and streamers are often put up and the once average looking rural *wat* is given life as visitors mingle about and socialise. The local *wat* plays its most important role at festivals drawing in people who otherwise would not step foot inside and others seeking to break the slow and sometimes methodic pace of the countryside. It also galvanises the local village and creates an opportunity for a sleepy rice farming community to demonstrate the status of their *wat* as seen through the attendance of locals and visitors alike.

I will not include all of the festivals performed throughout the year but instead will concentrate on several holidays that encompass the major and minor aspects of them. These include the Buddhist Sabbath, *T'ngai Seul*; common *neak ta* rituals performed within Buddhist ceremonies; and the *Pchum Ben* and *Katun* festivals. Although the latter two are separate from one another, they do mark the end of the rainy season and are important for both villagers and monks. Whereas the former is a large draw for villagers to appease the spirits of dead ancestors, the latter is popular for monks since it marks the end of their rainy season seclusion and a time when they can leave the *wat* as well as receive gifts donated by the laity. Although not every facet of the monastery's relationship with the local village/villagers may be elucidated from these ceremonies, they do represent the various levels and types of Khmer worship and cosmology practiced throughout the countryside.

The Buddhist Sabbath: T'ngai Seul

T'ngai Seul, or the Buddhist Sabbath, is held every eighth and fifteenth day of the waxing and waning moon. The celebration is rather low-key and both Wat Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite had a small number of participants throughout the year. Kompong Dtrou Lite had more of the core *sangha* members who would attend the event without fail. Chum Kriel, on the other hand, being a much more administrative (and 'rich') *wat* did not see as many people during the day as with Kompong Dtrou Lite. Those that did come generally did so to serve the monks lunch and thus gain merit. The fact that many at Chum Kriel (aside from two dedicated *don-chis*) came and went suggests that the *wat's* status was less than that of other *wats* that had many more

dedicated members in attendance.

Chum Kriel's proximity to an urban centre may have influenced this but the fact that the most important (in terms of administration) *wat* in Kampot province lacked the same number of visitors as a lowly rural *wat* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite on the Buddhist Sabbath demonstrates that other variables are at play. Specifically, the perceived wealth of the monastery (that is, the amount and type of patronage, symbolic architecture, and institutional power a monastery commands) and, therefore, the level of sacredness (and profaneness?) seemed to weigh more heavily upon a villager's mind than merely attending the closest *wat*. It should be noted, however, that local ministry workers are encouraged by the government to attend the *wat* on the main Buddhist holidays which may also help keep locals away.

The day is for the most part ignored by a good number of Khmers who may be busy tending to other affairs. Since it is a rotating day, many people can simply not afford to attend and at most may send a younger child to make a donation to gain merit on the family's behalf. The day was not that important for my monk informants as well unless it landed on a Sunday, a public holiday. One of the markers of the Sabbath for monks is the shaving of one's head usually done every fifteen days. It too is without fanfare and taken on as one more requirement of service.

Monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite benefited from a dedicated cadre of *sangha* members who showed up, rain or shine, while Chum Kriel seemed to pass the day without interruption. This was primarily due to monks attending the high school which was not interrupted because of the holy day. On one occasion at Chum Kriel I was speaking with several monks about the importance of *T'ngai Seul* but forgot which day

it fell upon. The monks were not sure either and went back and forth debating when it would fall next. They eventually had to call over another monk who hesitantly gave them the correct answer. The time spent with school in many ways suspended their normal duties. Classes continued without interruption and few visitors arrived thus relieving the monks from conducting ceremonies.

Kompong Dtrou Lite, on the other hand, had all the hallmarks of a rural *wat* on the Buddhist Sabbath. The elderly would come and bring gifts, namely food, and there might be a few extra children playing unless it was a school day (temple primary schools do not have the day off either). The *sangha* pray the *dhamma* in the morning and stay around to speak with one another and to the abbot. As lunchtime approaches the men generally remain in the *salaa* while *don-chis* prepare the food they have brought. Often women (who generally bring their children) come with offerings and socialise but generally do not stay long. As lunchtime approaches the *achar* rings the bell summoning the other monks (the abbot was always in the *salaa* speaking with his friends) who normally have been waiting eagerly for their second (and last) meal of the day.

Prayers ensue shortly thereafter led by the abbot and joined in by the other monks including any members of the *sangha* who can also recite them. The monks eat first as they sit on a slightly raised dais looking out over the *salaa* towards the *sangha* who distribute their portions. The lunch is more of an event with various dishes in the villager's best silver bowls passed throughout the crowd. There is no set menu and various meat and vegetable dishes as well as sticky rice cakes are distributed among those in attendance. Afterwards the monks exit the *salaa* one by one back to their quarters for a rest while many older members of the *sangha* spend the remainder of the

day cleaning the *salaa* and sleeping afterwards.

The Sabbath is generally not a major day and unless one is particularly devout it often passes unnoticed which may also be due to its revolving schedule. The primary reasons for attending are to keep up on village happenings, merit-making, and an opportunity for some children to get away from their daily chores if even for a brief while, similar to pre-war motivations (Ebihara 1968). The size of the crowd also varies according to the calendar (if close to a big event, more people will show up) or problems one (or many) may have. For instance, if there has been little rainfall, concerns about the upcoming harvest, or calamities in general, attendance will increase.

The story of one young man from Kampot town, originally from Chhouk District, 40km northeast of the town provides a little more insight into merit-making activities. Tola, 24, half Khmer, half Chinese, who had a Buddhist upbringing but is an atheist by choice, noted that he does not go to *T'ngai Seul* but gives his mother a couple of hundred riel (Cambodia's currency) for her to attend instead. His mother was the devout member of the family yet he always made sure to give her something come the Sabbath. While he did note that she would get upset with him for not attending, he was consistent in giving because as he later stated when dropping off a banana flower at a *wat* on *T'ngai Seul*, "Like I told you, that's what we do." Although he admitted to doing it because it was the Sabbath he was adamant that he was not religious.

As with many people his age, he saw Buddhism as important for the young but more so for older individuals, "It's important for older people to meet and talk with each other. It helps them." The social aspect of the *wat* and the services it provided for those too old to work (rice farming or otherwise) were not lost on many younger people who

viewed it as a positive aspect of the religion. While many did not feel a need for religion reflecting circumstances pre-1970 (Ebihara 1968; Vickery 1984), its importance for many older Khmers was noted. And although most (outside of the monastery) did not recognise it as a potential coping mechanism for experiences under the DK regime, the place of *T'ngai Seul* and other festivals was understood to be more than a time for simply making merit.

Neak Ta and T'ngai Seul: A Ceremony within a Ceremony

Within Prey Thom Commune there was a classical music group made up of five local ex-soldiers (several of whom still wore their old uniform trousers or field-jackets) who played at festivals or religious events. On one occasion the local villagers decided to pull their money together for a performance. The group set up their traditional instruments in the *salaa* consisting of two large drums (*Sampho*), three standing string instruments (*Tro*), and one smaller drum (*Skor Dai*). The *salaa* was filled with the normal cadre of regular *sangha* members arranging the offerings that would accompany the music. The program lasted close to 20 minutes and was played prior to the monk's noontime prayers.

What differed on this occasion was that the *sangha* asked the group to play to appease local folk spirits at the *wat*. Before they played they called out to the local *neak ta* of the Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite, *Dta-Maak*, asking him to come and accept the food they had brought. As I sat next to the other monks in the *salaa* listening to the performance I wondered whether their presence in the *wat* and playing music for the *neak ta* somehow ran counter to Buddhism. "No," Loak Poun replied, "they play for

neak ta, bray, [the] 'ghost' [*deveda*], and Buddha." He noted that the ceremony is done before any Buddhist rites are initiated but only occasionally to recognise the presence and power of the *wat's neak ta* (often the term *neak ta* is used in a general sense to cover all animistic spirits).

Neither the *sangha* members nor the monks saw anything abnormal with holding the ceremony for both local spirits and the Buddha. Later conversations noted that as the ceremony took place in a *wat* the Buddha would necessarily be included out of respect. Outside the *wat* or even at the northeastern part of the perimeter where the *neak ta* shrine is normally located, the inclusion of the Buddha would not occur. However, given that entreaties to *neak ta* and other folk deities are often done in private, the decision to include other spirits or the Buddha differs between individuals. Theravada Buddhism's practice within Southeast Asia differs from the more secularised versions of Buddhism that have gained popularity in the West (Seager 1999:16-17). The historical confluence of the Great and Little traditions (Spiro 1970; Kirsch 1977; Tambiah 1984) and the continued associations of the various Brahmanic cults with the royal court and the latter's connection particularly with Siva and Mt. Meru (McCloud 1995:29, 74) perpetuates the theistic quality of Theravada Buddhism as practiced in the region.

Neak Ta Wat's role within the monastery is one of religious protector watching over the temple to ensure people adhere to good Buddhist practice and behave in a respectful manner (Chouléan 1988:36-37). As one of the protectors of the *wat* it may be the recipient of offerings and music, however, it is recognised that its place is lower than the Buddha. The offerings that were given during the above ceremony were much more elaborate than those for the monks or the Buddha: a meal consisting of a stuffed pig,

rice, vegetables, and wine was brought into the *salaa* and displayed before the commencement of the music.

Wine is not given as an offering to the Buddha and it is safe to say that normally one would not bring alcohol into the *wat*. However, as the previous story of the inebriated elderly man in chapter three demonstrates, there is a good deal of leeway. This contrasts with Ebihara's experience in 1959-1960. Her writings show that there was a good deal more formality both locally and nationally. For example, during her fieldwork the government prohibited the sale of alcohol on the Buddhist Sabbath (Ebihara 1968:391). Certain things remain constant, though, as in her description of the elderly being the main attendees on *T'ngai Seul*.

While she did not note the presence of alcohol in the *wat* for extraneous ceremonies for *neak ta*, whether there has been a vast change between then and now may be doubtful (particularly considering that most *neak ta* rituals are private affairs conducted at a *wat's* perimeter). Further, since the above *neak ta* ceremony was paid for by the local core *sangha* members (all of whom were 50+ years of age) and approved by the abbot (74) it was not a case of younger members bringing in forbidden material without realising it ran counter to tradition. When I asked Loak Poun about the alcohol he replied that although it was not to be given as a gift for the Buddha, "But *neak ta*…it's okay."

As noted, the meal was different from that normally provided for the monks in that it was much more elaborate. The stuffed pig took the centre position upon a blanket while the other dishes in fine silver bowls were displayed around it. From the appearance it was apparent that more time had gone into its preparation then the normal

meals for the monks. This may be attributed to the infrequency of such ceremonies as well as the fact that certain foods cannot be consumed by monks such as pork and alcohol. The dichotomy also demonstrates the place of different aspects of the various traditions practiced within the temple. Based on observations of the use of space and folk rituals/shrines in relation to the *vihara*, there would appear to be room for grey areas within the *wat* that would fall outside of canonical Buddhism yet remain entrenched within the practical Buddhism of the countryside. Although what is profane and sacred is relative according to context, so too is the type of practical Buddhism employed from village to village. Those grey areas expand and contract according to the ritual, practitioners, and desired outcome of a given ceremony.

While carrying such a meal, let alone alcohol, into the *vihara* would not be acceptable, within the *salaa* under the guise of a *neak ta* ceremony (which was also parenthetically for the Buddha) these derivations may seem reasonable. As stated above, the *time* of the ceremony -- on *T'ngai Seul* or another holy day -- allows for socio-religious actions outside the realm of the everyday. Its specific place within the overall program (in the presence of monks before their lunchtime prayers) was permissible at Kompong Dtrou Lite and possibly at other *wats*, regional differences notwithstanding. While I did not witness a public *neak ta* ceremony within either Chum Kriel or Kompong Dtrou Lite on a day other than a holy one, given the ceremony's infrequent use, *T'ngai Seul* or another festival would likely provide the best possible venue.

Relating this to space, it would appear that the above inclusion of a folk ceremony offsets Durkheim's formulation that the profane must be kept distant from the sacred (1915 [1912]:56). Although relatively distant from the *vihara* in relation to the

salaa (there would seem to be no hard and fast rule as to what distance is acceptable), the psychological distance is not as great. The Buddha is included within the ceremony albeit tangentially but his place does conform with Durkheim's hierarchical "co-ordination or subordination" of the sacred within rituals (ibid). This was true even for the *neak ta* shrine at the outer edge of the *wat*. As people often pray to *neak ta* when ill or for other 'worldly' ailments, the Buddha would have no place in such a ceremony.

The Buddha's minimal inclusion within the above ceremony for *neak ta*, conducted by a group of performers and for no special reason save recognition and respect, was acceptable as the catalyst was not to achieve a specific result but for the maintenance of overall harmony. This is particularly true given that the resident monks, while not participating, nonetheless sat with the rest of the *sangha* during its performance. Their 'co-ordination' within the ceremony was not indicative of servile behaviour on their part but of the overall need within the village to maintain agreement with the sacred and profane within the space set aside for the *wat*.

This agreement, however, also influences perceptions of time which is given meaning by the actors in a ceremony when held at certain locations -- the local *wat* in this case. The ceremony intersects with sacred time creating a temporal space within the otherwise default, profane time. A folk ritual, therefore, can act as a medium between the Great and Little traditions when the parties to it accept its potential efficacy. Linking these two traditions through ritual requires the presence of a recognised space bridging the distance between them. Without the *wat* this nascent time cannot be properly realised. The ability of a folk ritual to affect events outside of the *wat* is questionable, though, given the limited range of influence compared to other local *neak ta* which

abound throughout the countryside in a relatively stable hierarchy based on popular and historical perceptions and have primacy in their respective spheres of influence.

Prachum Benda (Bonn Pchum Ben): Festival of the Dead

Towards the end of the rainy season, *Prachum Benda*, known colloquially as *Pchum Ben*, or the Festival of the Dead, takes place marking another transition in village life. While the New Year is important for festive purposes, *Pchum Ben* is a time for families to remember their ancestors as well as an opportunity to help them along in the afterlife while gaining merit. It covers fifteen days beginning on the first day after the full moon at the end of the tenth lunar month (during my fieldwork it was the end of September/beginning of October) when the gates of hell open and allow souls unable to rest to receive merit through actions by relatives (as well as strangers). People also have the opportunity to ask forgiveness from livestock for their toil and parents for wrongdoings committed towards them (Seng 2001). Several days before the festival, preparations begin as women start to make the various sweets and other rice cakes used in the upcoming ceremonies while monks look forward to the ability to leave the *wat* again after being sequestered for three months.

The most prominent part of the festival occurs every morning before dawn when people (mostly young) go to the *wat* with a 'ghost bowl' filled with rice cake and a small cut-out representing an ancestor's 'ghost'. Taking the offering from one's home to the *wat* leads the spirit to the temple in order for it to receive merit from those participating in the ritual which must be completed before dawn. The ceremony is particularly popular with young children as it allows them a chance to go out at a time that normally

would be forbidden. A parade of candles can be seen cutting through the darkness as troops of young boys and girls make their way to the *wat* (their participation also allows parents to fulfil their obligation, receive merit, and avoid the early rise).

Although the 'ghost' represents one's ancestors it is symbolised by an anthropomorphic shape with a somewhat malevolent expression. Vague in appearance and not necessarily attached to a specific individual but the concept of a familial relation, it embodies one's parents, relatives, or elders -- including fictive and non-kin -- who have passed on. The figure is attached to one end of a stick protruding from a centre cone made of a banana leaf filled with sticky rice cake. In the centre of the cone is a candle surrounded by several incense sticks with flowers along the periphery. The complexity of the design depends on the individual but often complex models are made by females and minimalist ones by young males. By lighting the candle at one's home, one placates the spirit and keeps it from following one back.

As young people arrive at the *wat* they socialise around the *vihara* waiting for the electricity to be turned on and for the monks to make their way over. The participants follow the same script as with most any ceremony: females sit inside while teenage boys 'hang out' outside and watch the proceedings. The monks are lined up by the abbot while *achars* hover towards the doors directing people where to sit. The morning ceremony begins with the large congregation going into the *vihara* to listen to the *dhamma* before going outside to present their offerings while *don-chis* meander through the crowd collecting donations stuck into the each person's bowl. Although the ceremony is one of the more auspicious ceremonies of the year, there is also a good bit of levity surrounding it. Both *achars* and *don chi*s seemed to accept this given the fact

that the vast majority of the participants are young and excited about being out with their friends while most adults were still home asleep.

With bowls in hand, the congregation begin their procession around the sanctuary three times placing rice cakes along the railings haphazardly in a clockwise direction occasionally dropping some in small placemats dedicated to those spirits without family to remember them. The offerings sustain and bring merit to one's ancestors as well as to oneself. At the end of the congregation's trip around the *vihara don-chis* may dictate how to dispose of the ghost cut-out either by burning it or more commonly by leaving it on a mat towards a stairwell. The degree of ceremony and symbolism depends upon the *wat*. At Wat Kampot within Kampot town there were several hundred participating and a great deal of coordination as opposed to Wat Chum Kriel where the ceremony seemed almost an afterthought. As noted above, during one visit to the latter, the *wat* did not even conduct the ceremony leaving a very surprised acquaintance attending it with me to conclude that the monks were "lazy". After the procession, the crowd disperses rather quickly as many if not most will soon be attending school or work. The difference between *Pchum Ben* and the other festivals is the participation of young people. Although it does provide them with an opportunity to engage in a holy ceremony, the fact that it is held towards dawn also provides them a chance to go out with their friends while it is still dark, something they would otherwise not be able to do.

Katun

Katun is held at the end of the rainy season to mark the monks' return from their three month seclusion. However, their seclusion is more or less ceremonial as they do leave the *wat* for various reasons such as school or family related problems. It is also a time monks look forward to since they will receive numerous gifts from local and outside patrons as well as new robes. It can be held on any day during a fifteen day period between the first day of the waning moon of *Ah-soit* and full moon of *Kaduk*. During the year of my study the ceremony began in the middle of October immediately after *Pchum Ben*. The monks of Chum Kriel explained that the ceremony gained importance during the life of Buddha when monks were unable to travel do to the monsoons. After the rains they would make their way back to see him, becoming filthy from the mud and water left behind. Upon seeing this villagers would take pity on them, donating food and new clothes[6].

When I asked monks at Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite which festival was their favourite, to a man every monk replied *Katun*. When asked why they noted the obvious -- they received a lot of gifts. They also recognised the ceremonial and spiritual aspects of it as well as some of the less-than spiritual parts. As with all festivals it is a chance to make merit, socialise, patronise a favourite *wat*, and contribute to its upkeep. Yet, *Katun* more than other festivals is a chance for the wealthy to donate large sums of money and can be a real money-maker for *wats*. As a *wat* may only hold the festival once during the fifteen day period, they are inclined to negotiate with donors wishing to

6 The Buddhist calendar is a lunisolar calendar used in the Theravada nations of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Sri Lanka with alternating months of 29 and 30 days. An extra day and a 30 day month are added at regular intervals.

hold the ceremony. It can be put on by the local community or groups as well as individuals. At Kompong Dtrou Lite, a Khmer-American wanted to sponsor the *Katun* festival as he was originally from the area. He sent a representative from Phnom Penh to the *wat* to speak with the abbot. As the expatriate planned to have a large ceremony he was given preference over the locals. If the latter wanted to put on the festival they would first have to negotiate with the larger donor to see if some compromise could be reached.

Monks were very matter of fact about this and they also understood that the locals may not be too pleased that an outsider -- even if originally from the area -- was given priority over them. For the locals it was also understood that the *wat*, while acting as a spiritual vehicle for donors, also acted in its own self-interest. However, the villagers also recognised the fact that villages patronising the *wat* benefit as a large, well known *wat* is a source of pride for the community. As Jon, a member of Kompong Dtrou Lite's *sangha* noted in chapter three put it, "A good *wat* means a good countryside." In many respects a healthy *wat* means a healthy community as well as 'good' community, not only as a source of pride but as a reflection of the community itself (Fitzsimmons 1957; Ebihara 1968). A dilapidated *wat*, on the other hand, did not always bode well for the community. Wat Ko-Sot northwest of Kompong Dtrou Lite was very run down and in need of work. The fact that it was also near O'Kroh Sah, a village close to Kompong Dtrou Lite that supported the Khmer Rouge and was looked down on by other villages, was seen as no coincidence. When I enquired about its run-down appearance one local villager of Kompong Dtrou Lite merely stated, "It's by O'Kroh Sah." He did not elaborate but his curt response said a good deal.

Even though local villagers may be barred from holding a *Katun* festival if outbid by another, they are still able to participate in the ceremony. There was also a general consensus that one should not get in the way of another's 'good luck' or merit-making. Further, as they also benefited through a *wat's* increased status there was no display of public animosity. Holding a *Katun* festival was also attributed to one's *kamma*. In the eyes of many, a person able to give large amounts of money obviously led a very meritorious previous life that allowed them to reach their current status and wealth. In a sense, they earned the right to throw a large festival even if others could not.

However, negative effects of large donations by outside groups and individuals can alter the opinions of many towards a *wat* itself but not necessarily towards donors. Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite was well known and (as with many *wats* in the province) had received money from the prime minister for construction of the *vihara* where his name was proudly displayed on its façade. Enough money was received over *Katun* during my stay that the *wat* was also able to start building a new residence for the abbot adjacent to the *salaa*. Even so, it was still very much a rural *wat* and was popular with locals and non-locals alike.

Chum Kriel, by comparison, was not popular with locals *because* of such large donations. The *Katun* festival at Chum Kriel was put on by the local government ministries, and so local villagers refused to attend. While the villagers were not necessarily less devout than their counterparts in Kompong Dtrou Lite, their negative view of the *wat* as 'privileged' was consequently transferred to the monks. This led to the perception that they were 'rich', distant, and ironically, less devout than those at more rural *wats* even with their advanced study of the *dhamma*, Pali, and Buddhist

ethics (and the fact that the vast majority originally came from rural wats).

On the day of Kompong Dtrou Lite's *Katun* festival the donor and his entourage arrived in ten large vans around 10 am. The *wat* was filled with flowers and audio equipment while a large tent was set up in the courtyard. The local villagers, who obviously could not compete with the expatriate's ceremony, contributed nonetheless with a huge meal made up for the visitors. After the meal everyone proceeded towards the *vihara* and circled it three times before entering the sanctuary to deposit their offerings. After listening to prayers by the monks the donor thanked everyone for coming and later left to visit his home village to see family and friends (his total donation was reputed to be around US$5,000).

Although originally from the province, the man did not have any real connection to the *wat* other than through Loak Poun whom he supported along with other monks in the area. He met Loak Poun through another monk attending the Buddhist university in Phnom Penh. He was looking for monks to support as a means of gaining merit as well as helping out people in his former home after becoming relatively successful in the US. As will be discussed below, in many ways gaining merit through socio-religious investments such as supporting monks and putting on ceremonies benefits both the donor (i.e., merit) and local *wats* (merit and infrastructure). It also perpetuates the ancient patron-client relationships that traditional Khmer villages have historically been built upon. Whether these relationships revolved around local cults of the lingam connected to the soil (Chandler 2000:20) or individuals and organisations that maintained traditional networks of loyalties (Heder and Ledgerwood 1996:30-31), the *wat* personifies a new extension of the patron-client system via increasingly influential

Khmer expatriates.

As noted above, locals are not entirely locked out of any gain from offerings which, although they may perpetuate ancient patron-client relationships, bring money and other goods that can be redistributed in times of need. Yet, too much can be a detriment as the *wat* comes to be perceived as a *wat* of the rich and powerful and one that has lost its connection with the local villagers surrounding it. The need for redistributing wealth by an individual among *wats* to receive more merit, therefore, acts as a counterbalance to any one *wat* gaining a majority share. Aside from Angkor Wat and other famous *wats*, the local rural *wat* benefits from large offerings only as much as it is able to retain its status and thus power-base among its core village constituents.

Monks benefiting from a donor's support also eases the burden upon the local community from having to be the sole providers for them (although it can and does hurt a man who has taken a vow of poverty to be considered a 'rich' monk). Seen longitudinally, the monk with good outside connections can gain good inside connections with powerful individuals within the country both in the secular and religious spheres. For those making the monkhood their life's work, such a status could aid them in achieving a higher place within the country's Buddhist leadership.

Local Agricultural Ceremonies

Aside from the ceremonies listed above, other ceremonies have retained their place throughout the countryside and help to regulate agricultural practices as well as providing an outlet for villagers seeking relief for droughts and/or excessive rains. Many villagers near Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel cited their importance but as with many other ceremonies there was a generational split. Younger villagers (and younger monks) often thought that these ceremonies may be helpful but tended to let other more competent individuals take part. This also corresponded with financial and employment status; those engaged in work other than agriculture were not as ready to accept the efficacy of these ceremonies, nor participate in them. Those that were primarily engaged in agriculture did participate, particularly if their parents or other older family members put considerable importance on their involvement. This was noted not only in Kampot province but also in other areas of the country. Even so, as with other aspects of rural Cambodian life this varied according to the local technologies employed, local histories and economic outlook, as well as the respective redevelopment efforts currently underway around the country.

The connection between water and religion is not necessarily a surprising one in a country dominated by an agricultural economy (Geertz 1963a; Sahlins 1972; Scott 1976; Popkin 1979). This economy is offset by the garment and tourist industry and the silent economic partner of the Buddhist monastery. As monks are removed from the public or profane world, their occupation buttresses the secular through the performance of annual rites to benefit the economy and ensure future success. They may also be physically removed from the public during certain periods, notably *Choul Vossa* or the

Buddhist Lent when monks are sequestered for several months and dependent upon the laity for material goods. This give and take within the rural and agricultural aspect of Khmer life is reflected in Buddhism's connection with nature. The monastic emphasis on spirituality and a lack of physical connection with the land through labour counterbalances a villager's emphasis on agriculture and dependence upon that monastic spiritualism to further agricultural gains. These gains are put back into the spiritual economy through sustaining a temple and gaining an individual merit while that more intangible value of 'luck' further increases the outlook of a good harvest (Durrenberger, P. E. and N. Tannenbaum 1992:80-81).

The three broadest ceremony categories involve either asking for rain, asking for it to cease, or giving thanks to deities -- both Great and Little -- for current and future harvests. They share similar characteristics incorporating, to a greater or lesser degree, elements of the various traditions within Cambodian Buddhism. Ceremonies requesting rain or its withdrawal are both believed to release humans and other plants and animals from suffering and bring the environment back into balance. When a ceremony is conducted will also be dependent on the type of rice planted. There would be a greater need for ceremonies requesting rain in areas with long-term rice if there is only a light amount of rain given its slow maturation period whereas with both long and short-term rice, growers conduct ceremonies asking the rains to cease when potential harvests are in danger. Rituals of thanks may be conducted in the presence or absence of significant rainfall as they also give thanks for future harvests. A poor harvest would not necessarily deter its dispensation; indeed, it may hasten it given its association with future crops. A poor harvest now may require an extra effort to ensure successful ones in the future.

A common water ceremony done at Kompong Dtrou Lite was *Won Som Dtuek Plee-un* ("Please Rain"). It can be done at any time and follows a similar script as other ceremonies. Monks are invited to pray or ask for rain and afterwards are provided with a meal or other offerings for their attendance. It differs from the other ceremonies described below as it is more of a personal ceremony that may be done by one family or person. Yet, in practice it is usually done by a group since a good rain is in everyone's interest and one family more than likely would not have the resources to put on the ceremony by themselves. It is more informal than other ceremonies and does not necessarily require the attendance of the entire village or a *wat's* abbot or *achar*. Nevertheless, the likelihood of success, as with other water ceremonies, increases with greater participation. While there is no firm delineation between this more personal ceremony and the more public ones noted below, the latter require the involvement of prominent members of the community as they are for the common good and, given their infrequency, take on greater importance.

Each *wat* holds slight variations of the ceremony according to the local history of an area and prominence of various beliefs and local spirits. Pursat province conducts such ceremonies but with attendant offerings and prayers to *Kleung Meun*, the famous Khmer military commander who sacrificed his own life to defeat the Thais. In the former capital of Udong in Kompong Thom province, monks stated they normally would be invited for breakfast and then would chant *until* it rained. They were confident that the ceremonies were more Buddhist oriented but did admit that *neak ta* rituals were performed before they were requested to come.

The second type of ceremony requests the cessation of rain. The *Wo-saa*

ceremony is conducted irregularly and only after flooding has stopped. The purpose is to ask for the withdrawal of water as it can destroy any potential harvest. The conduct of the ritual is similar to others; villagers request the presence of monks to recite the *dhamma* followed by invocations by local *achars* and/or villagers to local folk or Hindu deities. Variations depend on geography as some areas rely on individual prayers alone.

The last class are those ceremonies that thank local spirits for the natural resources allowing for that year's growing season. *Bon-da-lian* (or *Da-lian*) rituals are conducted by individual villages up to and after harvests to ensure a good harvest for the present and future. Villages support and attend each other's ceremony making offerings to local *neak ta* or other spirits requesting their help with that year's crop. Although the government does not have scheduled funds (outside of the New Year or other national events) they do request that people patronise local *wats* or conduct ceremonies. Even though the government assists *wats* vis-à-vis requesting donations and asking people to support them, as noted it still has been critical of the monastery, complaining that temples do not do enough to help their local communities.

Water ceremonies during the agricultural season also mark both a political and economic transition period for urban centres as migrant workers move back and forth during planting and the subsequent harvest several months later. This coinciding with Buddhist festivals such as *Choul Vossa* means that local *wats* will likely benefit from monies earned by migrant workers moving back to their villages with the coming of the rainy season. As monks are sequestered for several months during this time and dependent on contributions, the flow of seasonal labourers back to their homes with earnings from the end of one economic cycle facilitates the continuation of the *wat* as

the kingdom's silent economic partner. While unable to contribute physical labour, they remain relevant through their spiritual currency as the increased demand for rituals pertaining to agriculture (i.e., localised water based ceremonies) require their assistance. As the rainy season wanes and migration to urban centres increases, monks are allowed to return to their daily routine. They once again contribute to the normal economy that sustained them during the rainy season which they are believed to help influence through the interjection of ritual when required.

As these examples demonstrate, local ceremonies bring in elements of Buddhism, local folk beliefs, and Hindu elements when conducting agricultural ceremonies that usually end with prayers to Brahma directly. These ceremonies are believed to benefit plants, animals (particularly fish), and humans as they are dependent on the former two for their existence. The inclusion of individual actors/elements of the three traditions covers the broad base of Khmer cosmology to ensure certain success. Just as the three traditions are transformed into one seamless belief system, so too are its perceived benefits which are designed to affect the entire ecosystem.

However, from the local perspective these traditions are distinct making up a common vehicle for specific ends. One may have Buddhist monks pray before a folk ceremony that calls on a powerful *neak ta* that ends in pleas to Brahma. Even so, each part has a specific beginning and end whose actors may participate on some level while retaining a distinct status and role. The makeup of an event with several distinct parts drawing upon the Great traditions to appease nature and/or gods that influence it brings us to the concept of *attribution* (Heider 1958). This was further developed by Weiner (1986) who identified three dimensions of causality: *locus* or location of a cause;

stability or the likelihood of change; and *responsibility* or the ability to control the cause.

In short, attribution theory seeks to explain how people attribute causes to events that in turn affect individual motivation. *External* attribution credits causality to outside factors whereas *internal* attribution centres on the individual. The attribution of cause to outside forces takes on both internal and external stability and instability. An individual may be responsible for a lack of rain but only insofar as he/she is a member of a community whose member's actions or inactions brought about that condition. The intervention of religious specialists and individual or communal prayers to entities across the spiritual spectrum elicit social validation for any infraction believed to have occurred. What is not determined by this study is how the responsibility may shift between those who have caused distress (villagers) and those who intervene (monks or folk specialists). According to Heider, "If the success 'belongs' to the person, then the person is felt to be responsible for it; if it belongs to the environment, then the environment is held accountable" (1950:89). If a person(s) is responsible for causing a certain condition then to what extent are they relieved from blame by the interjection of another party who is responsible for righting it?

For communal prayers it is rather straightforward. Since everyone has come together to pray for rain they (theoretically) have taken on both the responsibility for current conditions and for rectifying any problems. In the case of an *achar*, his responsibility would be greater as he is both a member of the community while retaining a vested interest in a ritual's success as a quasi-religious specialist (having a foot in both the secular and religious spheres). For Buddhist monks, their responsibility for the success of a ceremony will be highest given their separation from the community,

specifically agricultural work. However, they too are dependent upon a ceremony's success since the fruits of their labour will hopefully produce enough crops to feed the local community and the local *wat* they are members of.

Given that local agricultural ceremonies are the result of communal as opposed to monastic action, the fact that monks perform a smaller portion of the ceremony in relation to its other parts may suggest a relationship between their contribution and their perceived vested interest in its success. Further, as monks are technically prohibited from performing manual labour it is reasonable to conclude that those who do (i.e., villagers) would likely be the main performers. That said, other ceremonies in which the *wat* is the central focus such as those surrounding the New Year also see a larger proportion of villagers performing activities while monks look on waiting to recite the *dhamma*. The main difference between ceremonies held inside and outside the *wat* is the motivation of the participants. While New Year, *Pchum Ben*, and *Katun* occur annually on a regular schedule, local agricultural ceremonies are conducted on an ad-hoc basis according to the needs of villagers and not the Buddhist clergy. Indeed, with a stable annual rainfall there may not be a need for such events. Although villagers perform the bulk of activities in both annual and non-annual ceremonies, the latter arise as the result of a specific need, such as the need for more or less rain.

Life-Cycle Ceremonies

Towards the end of March, I was invited to a life-cycle ceremony by several monks from Kompong Dtrou Lite. It took place 300m south of the *wat* towards Kep and was held for three individuals: an elderly couple and another older aunt (in reality a fictive kin). The *wat* was contacted a few days previously and four monks decided to attend. The number of monks in attendance depends upon the ceremony and how much those putting it on can afford. More monks can mean more merit but one asks only as many monks as can be provided for. How the monks decided which of them would go was generally based on availability but they took turns on an informal revolving basis.

The name of the festival was *Srong Prey-ah*. It is often done near the New Year and involves a short program of monks chanting the Pali sutras followed by the children and family of the three pouring water over their heads and presenting them with new clothes afterwards. The ceremony is to thank and recognise the good actions of the participants and is attended by numerous people from the surrounding area. The importance of knowing the sutras well plays a role in who is selected. Loak Poun and Loak Gern, 23, another young monk at Kompong Dtrou Lite who was also from the area, were among those asked to come because they were known to be some of the most knowledgeable of the monks at the *wat* (as well as Wat Chum Kriel). As the monks are presented with gifts for their participation it is in their best interest to be well versed in the sutras and many were well known for their skill in oration and consequently were asked to attend numerous ceremonies.

Crossing the paddy fields we came upon the house elaborately decorated with many tables set up for people to sit and eat. As the monks entered the vicinity of the

home, those putting on the ceremony as well as the three participants made their way over to prostrate themselves in the traditional Buddhist manner and thank the monks for coming. The bashful smiles of the young monks standing in front of their kneeling elders showed that these were still young men put in places of high status yet relatively uncomfortable with some of the ceremonial aspects of the religion. Two raised platforms were set up for the monks to sit and pray and where the three participants would later sit as family members poured water over them. A large tent was set up immediately to the south for a photo with the elders by a hired a photographer. The tent also served as the dining hall for the participants and their family and was stacked with gifts for them and the attending monks. As it was after 12 pm the monks were unable to eat and resigned themselves to an adjacent table next to the tent after concluding their services.

The event lasts two days in total. The first day begins in the evening with a small celebration while the next day is for the actual ceremony when the monks arrive and the physical washing of the participants takes place. The ceremony begins with an *achar* calling a *deveda* to preside over it and shortly thereafter the monks begin to pray. Loak Poun initiated the chanting shortly followed by others picking up and dropping off at certain stages depending upon which sutras they knew. Those participating at this point were typical of ceremonies in general: adults to the front, youth to the rear while new mothers with infants sat at nearby tables and young men meandered about watching the proceedings. After the monks prayed Loak Poun lit an incense candle and took two small branches dipping them in ceremonial water to cast over and bless the crowd. Shortly thereafter family and others in attendance poured the water over the three participants and then presented them with new clothes before they adjourned to their

place of honour for a special lunch amidst the gifts and offerings for them and the monks.

As the three monks retired towards the back of the tent waiting to be relieved by three more monks, the festive lunch continued around them. The following day the participants brought food for the monks as well as for the *wat's neak ta* followed by a ceremony similar to the one just described minus the ritual bathing. Although the ceremony was obviously important for the participants, the monks took it in their stride with Loak Gern casually remarking that they "do a lot [of similar ceremonies] this time of year." Along with other ceremonies, there was no bright line distinguishing the folk and Hindu elements from the Buddhist. Monks were invited yet *devedas* were called on while still later entreaties were made to the local *neak ta*.

The cycling of monks continues the chain of merit whereby those putting on the festival benefit as do the monks for their participation. Those family and non-family members who engage in bathing the three participants likewise gain from the merit garnered via the ceremony itself (for a discussion on raucous and 'non-traditional' merit-making rituals see Pruess 1979). As Bowie noted on merit-making activities in Northern Thailand, the location where such activities take place and those who benefit from them must not necessarily correspond to narrow doctrinal interpretation (1998:471). Further, such activities can act as vehicles of resistance against conservative Theravada views of class and who is the most worthy of gifts (the *sangha* as opposed to beggars) while at the same time demonstrating a relatively egalitarian distribution of them (ibid).

The participation of monks and those involved, while socially binding the community and expressing the motivations and merit-making capabilities of those

putting the event on, also perpetuates the economy of merit. It is this system that sustains the psycho-social communal activities that validate the reciprocal exchange between the lay community and the *wat* and provides individuals a relative power and status they otherwise could not achieve. Although the participation may be limited, the threshold required to maintain this system buoy's the continued cyclical exchange that provides for communal unity.

The local *wat* as an institution for reproducing power relationships between the *sangha* and village in this instance serves as a method of reducing the social space between pre and post-DK identities. The Buddhist *wat* in many ways symbolises Khmer identity and, on the state level, a symbol of ethnonationalism that was forcibly altered by 'non-Khmer' ideologies (see Handler 1988, for a discussion on ethnonationalism and Quebec identity). Reducing the social space between individuals provides the means for people to regain a greater degree of Khmer identity through ritual participation in traditional institutions, thus, marginalising those qualities seen by the wider community as 'non-Khmer'[7].

Issues of power and identity aside, service within the monastery after a life of causing egregious harm also performs a ritual purification of an individual. The offending individual, one who has polluted social relations through past acts, undergoes this purification moving from the (hyper?) profane former 'self' to one that may be re-

7 Foucault suggested that any analysis of power needs to be seen through the prism of antagonistic strategies (1982:780). Although one could certainly argue that there is an inherent antagonism between the local *wat* and secular authority (particularly post-DK), the reproduction of power relationships I am referring to is one that establishes at the local level those symbols of authority that influence interaction between individuals and belief systems. Even though aspects of belief systems do indeed appear to be antagonistic towards one another (i.e., the sacred and profane), the social space that is lessened through the participation in roles that have historically defined village life reaffirm the importance of the *wat* in maintaining overt symbols of Khmer identity.

accepted back into society via the sacred boundaries of the *wat*. Indeed, the qualities often ascribed to the Khmer Rouge by surviving Khmers centre on descriptions equating them with the jungle, that constant profane example associated with danger and evil in Khmer folklore (Ea and Sim 2001). The required actions and physical transformation provide the physical symbolism to demonstrate this change in status: the shaving of one's head and eyebrows, forced separation from the broader community, the wearing of specific costumes, and the use of a different and sacred language. As 'pure' institutions such as the *wat* with its sacred boundaries re-classify men during their liminal period of monastic service, individuals acquire a new identity as 'cleansed' thus reducing the risks to the wider community once they return to secular life (such as through a re-evaluation by the newly 'cleansed' as to their obligations after monastic service or a reduction in the likelihood of retribution by those seeking revenge).

The Merit Economy: The Wat as an Economic and Political Distribution Centre

A final aspect of Buddhist festivals and the *wat*/monkhood is the concept of merit-making and the distribution of wealth. A good deal of money is spent annually on festivals and other socio-religious events that express to the larger community an individual's merit-making capability, commitment to the *dhamma*, and care for their ancestors. Merit may be employed in a variety of ways: to gain status in the present or future, acquire clients (thus repositioning yourself as a powerful individual), or to aid one's ancestors. Aiding one's ancestors may also further one's own status through the acquisition of 'enhanced identities'. The distribution of wealth among *wats* benefits the

resident specialists, those deceased, as well as one's own current position as an individual with the means and desire to recognise the place of one's ancestors in their former lives.

The greater the accumulation of wealth in the image or symbol of those departed, the more recognition the deceased gains as one deserving of a higher existence in the next life. This in turn increases the status of those living as being connected to individuals so deserving of recognition. An individual can thus augment their identity/status if the deceased has been granted a greater amount of merit through a surviving member's overindulgent merit-making practices. In this section I will address the more general aspects of merit and political economics and the local *wat* and then cover gift giving and reciprocity concerning *neak ta*.

The issue of economics in anthropology has centred on how wants and demands balanced against goods and services are culturally defined. These have ranged from Malinowski's study of Trobriand Island economics (1922) to Maus' 'gifting' ([1925] 1990); Polanyi's critique of modern capitalism and its affect on human values (1944); the formalist approach of the 1960s (LeClair and Schneider 1968) and Sahlins evaluation of 'stone-age' economics (1972). It expanded to include developmental and peasant studies (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976) and Neo-Marxists' focus on change, struggle, and dynamism (Friedman 1975; Godelier 1977); as well as Scott (1976) and Popkin's (1979) study of Southeast Asian farmers followed later by ecology (Halperin 1989) and feminism (Waller and Jennings 1991). More recently, Good's work on ceremonial economy (2004) examined worship and distribution within a royal South Indian temple.

Of course, attempting to analyse the rationality of individuals when they donate to a *wat* is difficult, especially when they are in the midst of collective ritual. The strategies they employ in choosing to donate to one *wat* or tradition over another do not easily reconcile with those used in economics. The following discussion is not meant to establish the rationality or irrationality of individuals engaged in religious acts but an analysis of the different types of public and private worship within Khmer cosmology and the methods used to ensure their success.

Scott's assessment of Southeast Asian farmers argues that indigenous village-based subsistence traditions were disrupted by colonial powers imposing modern capitalist methods that included large scale farming to the village's detriment (1976). In contrast, reciprocal exchange, so vital to village economics, centred on a moral understanding that stressed the importance of community. The potential threats of "the vagaries of weather and the claims of outsiders," fuelled this reciprocity and moral outlook as peasants were more risk-averse than their colonial counterparts who had little to lose (Scott 1976:4). Rebellion and passive resistance gained expression through various religious cults and political movements that reflected peasant morality as opposed to the more capitalist-driven Western individualism.

Popkin, by contrast, argues that the moral peasant did not always live in a subsistence economy but did at times incorporate the market system and was just as likely to take risks to further gains (1979). The peasant community was not the aggrandised vision many economists claimed but had conflict and social stratification while lacking a social welfare net. Central bureaucracies created overburdening taxation systems and denied villagers property rights. Modern capitalist institutions, on the other

hand, did not create new subsistence crises but new political forums that led peasants to turn to collective action and unrest (ibid).

Although Scott's argument sounds reasonable, it raises the issue of whether the moral outlook of an agrarian society can be easily defined when villages have historically been separated from one another by the threats of weather, outsiders, and the vast, often impenetrable forest. Indeed, peasant morality as a concept is too vague to be applied broadly to enclaves with distinct interests. However, regarding merit-making activities, villagers in my research site often reflected both Scott's and Popkin's viewpoints. Yet, individuals would engage in reciprocity as a means of garnering a better afterlife. Local monks come from the local villages and supporting them through monetary or material goods redistributes individual or collective gain (rice, for example). In return, merit is distributed to villagers who retain it in their 'merit portfolio', the greater accumulation of which will ensure a better station in the next life. While that moral outlook expressed by Scott does ensure that the community will survive (i.e., that social-welfare net), the average villager is also acting in their own self-interest for future gains.

Even so, the idea of social-welfare is not as utopian as it would appear. Not all villagers support the local *wat*; indeed, some are downright hostile to it believing it has too much already or that monks retain a high social status while living off the work of others, à la classical Marxism. Conspicuous displays of merit-making on the individual level gains a higher place in future lives but on a communal level, particularly during festivals, it also is a demonstration of one's merit-making capability, and for some, their power in this life. Thus, the 'exalted self' (promoted when people receive positive

feedback through identifying with a successful person) compared to the 'beleaguered self' (when attempting to restore the self-concept to a baseline level as opposed to the group) is expressed within the symbolism and attendance cycles at the *wat* (Alicke 1999:36-37). The highly visible names of generous donors in the public *salaa* or on the façades of buildings attest to merit-making as more than an act of individual reciprocity but also a public display that can secure greater status among others. As many of the donors are high-ranking members of the government, their individual and/or collective offerings have been noted to act as a catalyst for political influence in the region.

Attendance generally varied at Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite, and as with other *wats*, this variation corresponded with the date of both the Buddhist Sabbath and upcoming festivals, particularly when landing on the same day. Some of the larger festivals (such as *Choul Vossa* and *Pchum Ben*) saw a definite increase in attendance as is common in other Theravada nations. On *Choul Vossa*, Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite had close to 300 people throughout the day while Wat Chum Kriel had only 50-75. The difference in number was said by many to be due to Chum Kriel's 'rich' status compared to Kompong Dtrou Lite's rural status. While this may have been a primary motivation for many, the fact that it was not far from an urban area which contained several other *wats* and that most of the monks at the temple were not from the area may have also led to a low turnout.

The difference is important though because *T'ngai Seul*, along with other holidays, is a chance to make merit but when coupled with a Buddhist festival it also is a time for a distribution of wealth. The more *wats* one attends the more offerings (most often money but also food) one will likely contribute to the local economy. The money

people give is collected by the abbot who in turn disperses it to the younger monks for travel, supplies, and other living expenses. The numerous festivals throughout the year act as a mechanism for keeping one's merit portfolio full as well as sustaining a segment of the population that serves to maintain that portfolio. Ritual distribution and exchange in turn transform material goods into symbols of prestige or temple honours (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976). This can further lead to a designation of a leader who maintains authoritative control over resources used in exchange. Over time, this leader can come to represent the group as a single entity during ceremonies and other rituals (ibid).

However, as Good describes in his own analysis of a South Indian temple, ritual redistribution is not the sole mechanism at work (2004:306-313). Redistribution and reciprocity, whether public or private, are not readily distinguishable from one another nor is reciprocity always balanced (reciprocity will be discussed in greater detail below). Good notes that offerings made in public Hindu rituals are not dispersed among the participants while in private worship the material exchanged between the donor and deity is not returned in full but only in part (2004:311-313).

An interesting example within Cambodia involves those ceremonies specifically for *neak ta* conducted within the *wat* as noted above. Donations in the form of food are distributed among the participants, however, not all in attendance are participants in the strict sense of the word. After a musical group has concluded their performance calling the *wat's neak ta* to the *salaa* to partake in the food, it is then distributed to the attendees as well as the monks who are also present for the ceremony. Although monks are restricted from participating in the ceremony they nonetheless benefit from it. Their

presence is a matter of course, though, as such *neak ta* ceremonies are held prior to lunch and the recitation of the *dhamma*. Even so, they are neither restricted nor required to attend. The recitation, however, is distinct from the *neak ta* ceremony as the latter is usually done only on special occasions such as in times of need or to maintain or restore harmony.

The question remains whether the monks who are present are involved in the above ceremony if they must refrain from participating or if their presence contributes to the potency of it, thus, forming a mode of participation. While they do not participate in the ceremony directly, they do participate in the consumption of the food and, therefore, participate indirectly in an otherwise prohibited act. Further, if their presence does contribute to the success of the ceremony, then the prohibition against them participating is in word only with no negative spiritual repercussions arising from it. Yet, this latter scenario raises even further issues of whether edicts handed down by the Khmer monastic hierarchy in Phnom Penh realistically reflect Khmer cosmology as it is practiced throughout the country. Whether one could include this ceremony on an even footing with others such as *Katun* or *Pchum Ben* is debatable. However, as has been noted throughout, what is and is not 'Buddhist' varies not only between the Mahayana, Vajarayana, and Theravada traditions but even among local practitioners.

Given that so many people do give a fair amount to *wats*, there exists the constant intertwining of micro-family economics with macro-village economics meaning that a form of rural child-support is perpetuated. As most monks serve in their local village *wat*, the economic burden is in essence shifted from the primary caregivers (parents, other family members) to the village at large. The benefit of one's son

becoming a monk is that it relieves primary caregivers of some immediate financial worries through sharing their responsibility with the village while gaining merit from their son's entrance into the *wat*. While there is no definitive formulae regarding merit-making activities or the potential increase in the merit gained from donating to a *wat* one's son serves in, interviews and observations suggest that primary-caregivers would more likely give to a *wat* where their son resides. However, this is predicated on the religiosity of the caregivers as well as that of the rest of the community. Caregivers with low religiosity may in fact feel they do not need to attend a *wat* simply because they have a son who is a monk. Giving their child to a *wat* relieves the family of the immediate financial burden but their level of patronisation and personal conduct could offset any merit gained from their son's service.

Although communal donations were never a public issue per se (other than the relatively low regard for villages that did not support *wats*, such as O'Kroh Sah) because merit-making is usually an individual endeavour, those individuals who gave consistently normally did so for both communal and personal gain. A healthy *wat* means a healthy community while merit-making activities secure a better place in the next life. Poor, rural *wats* with an active *sangha* may not see much of a gain in terms of money but a gain in community cohesion through their participation. Conversely, as Wat Chum Kriel demonstrates, with outside support (either by the government or through foreign donations) the relative wealth of a *wat* compared to others is increased but community support for the *wat* may be lessened; indeed, a community's cohesion over the issue may be strengthened over time. Although Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite has received support from high ranking government officials in the past, the amount received annually

compared to Wat Chum Kriel is minuscule.

The parents of monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite did visit the *wat* on occasion compared to Chum Kriel where resident monks from the surrounding countryside noted that their parents did not. While this was almost always due to time and ease of travel and not necessarily to its 'rich' status, the difference between a 'rich' *wat* patronised by the wealthy and a poor, rural *wat* is an example of a bifurcated system within merit economics. That is, the variation in the production, distribution and consumption of merit between high and low status *wats* with respect to the communities they serve; the status of individual/group patrons; the frequency and amount of their offerings; and the material wealth generated by the *wat* and the subsequent rise or fall of its status in relation to other *wats*.

This process can also take place on the national level: Thailand's Sangha Administration Act of 1902 stated that all clergy members were bound by local custom, regulations, and laws of the kingdom, for example (Keyes 1971:566). Reigning in peripheral monasteries and monks allowed for the nationalisation of the faith making Thai identity synonymous with Buddhism (ibid). Similarly, in the wake of political unrest in the late 1980s, the Burmese government sought to obligate the periphery to the hegemonic centre through participation in an economy of merit on the national scale via the transformation of communal ritual (Schober 1997:219). This transformation on the national stage regulates access to power, prestige and merit through complex structures and state-sponsored rituals (ibid).

This bifurcation is further exacerbated by the influx of increasingly influential transnational donors. Donations from outside sources such as diasporic communities

maintain connections with places of origin through sponsoring local festivals or other merit-making acts (Tambiah 2000:169). Loak Tang, 22, of Chum Kriel had a 'godmother' in northern California who came to know him through monks attending the Buddhist university in Phnom Penh. She is originally from the northwestern province of Battambang but otherwise does not have a connection to Kampot province. However, as with the expatriate seen in the above *Katun* festival, the act of donating to one's 'home' (be it the nation or a specific locale) stands in direct competition with indigenous groups as well as the government. Although lacking the state-wide mobilisation of merit-making acts as occurred in then Burma (now Myanmar), the current ruling political party in Cambodia, the CPP and its high ranking members, have exercised an increasingly strong hand in the monastery on the local and national level. The solidification of power in certain *wats* and the CPP's well noted presence therein has in many ways diluted the sacred identity of these monasteries along with their status as an independent voice and check on Khmer society.

This can occur in a variety of ways but the most apparent witnessed at Wat Chum Kriel was through the social separation of the *wat* and its cadre of monks from the surrounding villages and the increased connection with non-local groups who had greater wealth and political clout. While the *vihara* and shrine for the remains of victims of the Khmer Rouge were still sacred places, the *wat's* identity as a place to make merit differed from other *wats* given its scholastic and administrative activities. The rather run-down appearance of the wooden *salaa* and the ramshackled state of the *neak ta* shrine were also indicative of the amount of time and effort locals were willing to invest in the *wat*. As these structures are often cared for by lay individuals who frequently

patronise a *wat*, the stark contrast between them and those at smaller, more rural temples was readily apparent.

Political Economy and Social Capital

The political economy which has developed in this environment and in the preceding years following the demise of the Khmer Rouge has created a role to be filled by a number of entities, political and social alike. Put simply, political economy refers to how an economy can limit or promote the possibilities for action among individuals or groups through access to resources allowing for greater participation in the political process (Hughes 2003:9). In analysing the political economy in Cambodia, Hughes describes the NGOs in the country as developing in a way that sees them concentrated in Phnom Penh and heavily relying on international powers (ibid 171). This has often resulted in them operating in a hierarchical and centralized manner, emphasising the use of foreign knowledge and cautious mediation with the government and grassroots movements. However, she contends that the political economy of international support and the resources they require often hinder the ability of NGOs and other organisations to facilitate cultural change (ibid).

Following the UN sponsored elections of 1993, the rivaling FUNCINPEC and CPP parties, trying to negotiate transition from war to peace, allowed little room for open political voices which could stand in opposition to them. Consequently, the openness and transparency sought by international organisations lost out to more powerful state actors seeking to maintain control over a power base won after years of turmoil. As a result, NGOs and other organisations concentrated in Phnom Penh

displaced issues to the international community rather than attempting to enforce scrutiny on political actors/politicians. Being concentrated within the capital has meant that outreach to the countryside is not as effective as it would otherwise be, resulting in a hierarchical relationship between NGOs and their partners in outlying areas. Thus, the education schemes employed have created what Hughes calls a relationship of tutelage rather than true partnership (ibid).

Other schemes attempting to diversify power structures in villages were often shown to result in power being exchanged between influential local men rather than the community as a whole. Open rebellion tends to be rare and the lack of civil space in villages within which to protest means that open dissent is not likely to occur. Thus, villagers opt to take their protests directly to the capital rather than attempt to protest within their home villages (Ledgerwood and Vijghen in Hughes 2003:172). During my fieldwork, there were several times throughout the course of the year when villagers from throughout the country would protest in the capital regarding land seizures by military forces and food shortages due to the drought the country was experiencing. There never were local protests in my area of research and any complaints that I would hear about or were expressed to me were often muted or done in private. Perhaps this was due to a sense of powerlessness or indifference but the quote noted above in chapter four made to me by a monk about refraining from discussing politics may demonstrate that Khmer sense of maintaining harmony rather than discussing difficult or potentially problematic issues in public.

The loss of land or the inability to hold onto one's land in the face of extra-judicial actions by the police or military is also problematic in terms of political

economy. Neo-institutional theories cite the critical need for arresting social conflict and the clear defining of property laws for the economic prosperity of transitional countries (Bojadzieva 2005:4). Transitional countries in the Mediterranean such as Macedonia display a lower potential for bringing foreign investment compared to transitional countries in Central and Eastern Europe due to social unrest (Altomonte and Guagliano, in Bojadzieva 2005:3). Certainly the feeling of powerlessness when confronted by elements of the state that operate outside of the law can be exaggerated when those elements are heavily armed individuals. Poverty and instability in a country such as Cambodia can also lead to greater human rights abuses such as the trafficking of women and children in the country and its surrounding impoverished neighbours (Robles 2004:136).

Greater political influence gained by groups and individuals in Cambodia must also be measured against the influx of foreign development firms for major construction projects, generally in the capital, and the possibility of future oil drilling off the country's coast. Given that these projects will more than likely benefit the country's centre rather than the outlying countryside, the influence local individuals can muster will require a greater degree of cooperation with NGOs and other organisations working with the government to ensure that all voices are heard. How this affects the Buddhist monastery is dependent upon its ability to maintain separation from the government and act as a buffer against political excesses. However, this stands in potential conflict with the patronage it receives, both monetarily and in terms of prestige.

The two temples in this study differed in that the local economy the two were situated in varied from a rural (Kompong Dtrou Lite) to a semi-rural (Chum Kriel)

environment close to an urban centre. Thus, whereas Kompong Dtrou Lite depended a great deal (almost solely) on support from the surrounding villages, Chum Kriel could count on donations from more wealthy patrons due to its status as the seat of monastic administration for the province. Kompong Dtrou Lite tended to draw individuals and groups in a more radiating, web-like manner from near and far. However, Chum Kriel appeared to be more hierarchical, attracting wealthy and politically connected individuals ranging from local level politicians, to high-ranking provincial military personnel, up to the prime minister.

Thus, the influence exerted over individuals depended on both monasteries' notoriety (both positive and negative) and how knowledgeable their respective monks were thought to be. Although *wats* are a centre for much activity, the relative ease of travel along with the ubiquity of modern communication devices such as mobile phones and local internet shops springing up in even some of the smaller urban centres also has taken away an element of their ability to be the main hub of news regarding politics. The political economy that exists within this environment has been furthered by the democratisation efforts of local and international organisations and foreign powers along with economic reforms. While these have played a role within Buddhism's return, the work of monks and lay personnel on the local level in re-establishing traditions and services helped pave the way for the re-establishment and acceptance of the monastery. The work by monks on a national scale, encouraging democratic efforts, voting, and their work in anti-AIDS and smoking campaigns has also led to their increased status.

The relationship between the state and civil society institutions in the midst of this reconstruction has been precarious while the ability of political officials, particularly

the prime minister, to remain in office led some of the residents of Prey Thom to be dismayed about future attempts at democratisation. “Before, Sihanouk had the power. Now, it’s Hun Sen -- nothing changed,” remarked Saam, the father of a key informant noted above who had escaped from a Khmer Rouge collective. The ability of individuals to participate in the democratic process differs from their motivation to do so or expectation of real change. Thus, a sense of helplessness or the inability of an individual to change Cambodian politics is found within many Khmers. Nonetheless, the motivation to live a peaceful life and have the ability to provide for one’s family outweighs, what for many, are issues within the capital that do not immediately concern them. Generally speaking, candidates or parties that can be seen to change one’s circumstances (which by and large revolve around their village and/or commune) such as digging irrigation ditches, paving roads, or building schools and additions to the local temple, have more sway than parties that promise reform.

In this regard, Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite differed in terms of investment but this did not equate to greater numbers of local visitors for Chum Kriel. The *wat* has been visited three times by the prime minister and was often attended by local politicians and ministry officials during auspicious ceremonies. While some *wats* in this position may be viewed as more influential for merit-making, this did not reverberate among the surrounding villages near Chum Kriel. This raises the question of whether the amount of merit that can be obtained from certain *wats* varies according to one’s status and identity.

Smaller *wats*, being easier targets for the Khmer Rouge and often used as killing centres, tended to take on added importance during festivals such as *Pchum Ben*. Yet,

Chum Kriel did maintain an important status for those wealthy enough to have their remains placed there within stupas. In 1995, an army general was ambushed by the Khmer Rouge on the highway near Chheuk District and later died from his injuries. Although Chhuek District is 40km outside of Kampot town and he did not have any specific connection with Chum Kriel, his ashes were placed within a large stupa that his family had built for him next to its *vihara*. As Chum Kriel was the 'first' *wat* among others in the province, it was the logical choice for a man in his position. This does not necessarily reflect the spiritual relevance of the *wat* (in terms of its degree of sacredness compared to others) but its capacity to reflect the status of those connected to it.

In many respects, the *wat* lacked that personal connection more rural villagers would likely have with their own village temple. Its communal role was superseded by its administrative and educational position which was easily seen during festivals and other special events when it lacked a sufficient amount of participants. Having one's remains kept there was a sign of their wealth and ability to afford a large stupa thereby increasing their status in death and likely enhancing the status of their family. The general's interment differed from that of a peasant killed in a similar manner. The fact that he had the means to build a stupa kept his spirit wandering the countryside, an option generally not open to villagers dependent on subsistence farming.

This also raises the issue of social capital and its relevance within a Khmer context. Bourdieu's (1974; 1984) concept of social capital was divided into three dimensions -- economic, cultural, and social -- each with its own association to class. Social capital is thus "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less

institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). Putnam (1993) later explored social capital defining moral obligations and norms, social values such as trust, and social networks (particularly voluntary associations) and Italian governmental reforms in the 1970s. He noted that in the north of Italy social, political, and religious associations were defined as horizontal in nature, extending beyond the limits of kinship, whereas in the south such associations were vertical with a strongly enforced hierarchy and order on a latent anarchy (ibid 130).

I do not believe it would be useful to attempt to analyse the social capital of the monastery today in Cambodia without giving thought to the capital acquired by other groups, particularly political elites and Khmer expatriates living abroad. As noted, the influx of donations and construction projects can influence perceptions of monks and temples being seen as 'rich' and privileged. Further, the status of the CPP within the area is rather high given its political power in what is basically a one party system along with close ties with China which has become a major investor in the country (Postlewaite 2008). However, what benefits the capital rarely spills into the countryside leaving rural *wats* to rely on donations from other sources. Individual monks who personally received assistance from Khmer expatriates or other foreign nationals did not cite any antagonistic feelings directed towards themselves, although individual jealousy from monks not so lucky to receive such donations may be present.

The social capital of the monastery as a cultural institution according to Bourdieu's above criteria needs to be separated along national, regional, and local lines. The monastery has rebounded greatly since its return as an institution of the national religion garnering the devotion of the monarchy and political elites alike. This is also

seen regionally but as Chum Kriel demonstrates, such conspicuous acts and donations by political elites do not necessarily increase a particular monastery's status or that of the cadre serving it. On a local level, Chum Kriel's social capital is low considering it generally did not live up to its obligations as viewed by locals who often spoke of it as too connected to wealthy and powerful patrons and not serving the needs of those immediately surrounding it. That does not necessarily mean its obligations extend only to its immediate surroundings, particularly since it is the seat of monastic administration for the province and home to its only Buddhist high school. In terms of social values/trust its status among locals as wealthy and disengaged, or more so than other temples, meant that festivals were not patronised as much in relation to other *wats.* However, the fact that this view was known by monks may have contributed to this notion given their lack of connection, or idea that Chum Kriel was their 'home' *wat*.

Social networks were indeed created and maintained at the temple but these were two-tiered. Connections were made vertically with elites who support the temple (building stupas and other structures) receiving public and spiritual recognition in return. Whether the social capital generated is relevant in the semi-rural context the *wat* is situated in is dependent on individual attitudes regarding the temple as well as knowledge of Buddhism and its role and/or importance in general. The time and place where that capital can be utilised varies according to context and the individuals holding such capital. Their behaviour and actions toward the lay-community could offset any influence they would otherwise enjoy. Thus, in the case of Chum Kriel, while associations were vertical they were also exclusive; the social capital garnered from supporting the *wat* stemmed from the temple to outside groups who otherwise had little

to no interaction with the rest of the commune.

Perhaps as to be expected, Kompong Dtrou Lite provides a different model in which the social capital is high given its integration within the community it serves and the fact that it pulls in members from surrounding villages to serve as monks. Economic engagement is also well integrated while the involvement of political elites is low, save for occasional visits and donations. This may, actually, increase its social capital given its limited exposure to larger, more powerful entities. This limited exposure may demonstrate that it maintains a spiritual/'traditional' identity of what a rural *wat* and its cadre should embody, while demonstrating a certain level of connection with secularly powerful individuals and institutions whose limited patronage validates, without diluting, that identity.

However, this is measured against an image of what the Buddhist *wat* was, or was thought to be, pre-1975. In many respects this creates a symbol for many urban or politically associated individuals to connect with, thus demonstrating or maintaining a connection with the countryside while signifying for the temple and those that normally patronise it, a level of notoriety that enhances its status. This increase in status does not necessarily mean a rise in social capital that is recognised by all sectors of society but this is logical given individual attitudes and experience. Even so, Kompong Dtrou Lite's social capital, like Putnam's Italian example, is more broad-based with associations and social networks branching out among local villages instead of vertical associations as with Chum Kriel. Monks come from local communities as do the members of the sangha; lifecycle ceremonies are attended to by monks from the temple who benefit from local donations; and the primary school is very popular with local children who, as

noted, often treat monks as ‘big brothers’ and the *wat* as more of a place for fun and learning rather than a sacred site.

With respect to the Sabbath, it is still just another day in many ways and the actions of monks often reflect this. Kompong Dtrou Lite was rather sedate given the small number of monks and *sangha* and its pastoral setting. Chum Kriel, while not having a large *sangha*, nonetheless had a high number of monks attending its high school, giving it more of a university dormitory feel even on the Sabbath. Regardless of the day, when not in school monks generally stayed close to their dorms chatting with their friends or visitors. During one particular *T’ngai Seul* during *Choul Vossa*, a large thunderstorm suddenly broke out sending monks and visitors alike indoors. As the monks and I sat out the storm in their quarters talking about local news and the surrounding countryside, we were soon joined by their other acquaintances. Perhaps the idea of being sequestered for several months, the rain, or a combination was at work as many of the monks began to get restless. As I peered out west behind one of the barred windows onto the rice fields slowly being covered by rain, I heard a loud expletive to my left as Loak Tang jabbed one of his friends in the ribs. His friend, who was not a monk, quickly punched Tang jokingly on the arm and both broke into smiles among the laughter of the other monks.

The scene was fairly routine as could be expected given that a large number of young men held together in close proximity often engage in jokes and pranks. This went on while other monks went about their preparations for the next day, namely preparing their breakfast while others huddled beneath the awning outside chopping wood for a fire. Around this time a woman in her mid-thirties came into their quarters asking the

monks questions about the upcoming period -- were they expecting many visitors, where were they coming from, and so on. She was one of the many vendors that went from *wat* to *wat* on various festivals selling sweets and other party favours. 'Festive time' also provided an opportunity to curtail certain formalities. Normally a woman would not walk into a monk's quarters unannounced but the woman's age (and perhaps indifference) allowed for a financial angle to be exploited. Monks are aware of the number of people attending festivals throughout the year and are always happy to have visitors, especially when sequestered. Likewise, the lay members of a *sangha* know the benefit of added visitors as this brings a greater economic gain to the monastery for the rebuilding of structures or the completion of new ones.

Merit-Making and other Traditions

Sahlins (1972) identified three major groups of reciprocity: balanced, where each recipient gives equally; generalised, where there is no time frame or expectation of giving or repayment; and negative, such as stealing. He went on to state that in most "primitive" societies, balanced reciprocity was the most common form of exchange (ibid 190). Bourdieu, on the other hand, suggests that gift giving in pre-capitalist societies is a form of domination and more personal than that found in modern states (1977:189-191). Yet, other authors have suggested that domination may not be the driving force behind gift giving so much as the validation of one's power and authority (Durrenberger and Tannenbaum 1992:80). Darlington also notes the historical importance of gift giving as a means of defining, or perhaps maintaining, social positions as with the "ecology monks" of Thailand (1998:12). However, measuring the closeness or distance between

individuals involved in reciprocal exchange other than through the types of reciprocity expected or exhibited is questionable (Good 2004:310).

This latter point is particularly true with those gifts given to *neak ta*. How does one measure the type of reciprocity expected when one of the participants is not human? One answer is to analyse the relationship between folk specialists and gift givers. Even so, generally speaking those giving gifts to *neak ta* do so privately. What is expected of *neak ta* is context driven (such as alleviating illness, protection, good luck, etc.) and one runs the risk of overanalysing expectations of gift givers for things such as an illness when what is expected is simply a cure. Although the roles *neak ta* are believed to play in the lives of villagers are fluid, the *neak ta* shrine itself is static in that it occupies a significant feature such as a large tree or a set location within a *wat*, specifically the northeast corner. Maintaining a *neak ta's* position in the minds of villagers or those within a particular area would seem to rest more on maintaining its significant or specific physical place upon the landscape. That said, *neak ta* are more regional in their influence. The destruction or removal of a sacred site would likely mean the occupation of another: Yeh Mao currently occupies, among other places, a large tree outside of the former home of King Sihanouk in Kep overlooking the ocean, a place it did not occupy before the war.

If we are to use Sahlins' reciprocity model for giving gifts to *neak ta* it would appear that there is balanced reciprocity occurring, however, the time frame in which *neak ta* are expected to reciprocate seems to be more generalised. While there is an expectation that *neak ta* will alleviate illness, bad luck, etc., when that will occur was not noted to have any specific time frame, only that it would occur so long as an offering

(or perhaps several) was made. Smart notes that for a gift to succeed it must "follow the social forms that usually prescribe that it be an unconditional offer" (1993:389). Yet, we must question whether gifts to monks or *neak ta* are unconditional when they are made with the expectation that merit will be bestowed or a desired change in one's life will occur. An unconditional gift to *neak ta* to restore or maintain harmony is still predicated on the expectation that it will occur sometime in the future. Gaining merit through gifts to the monastery will influence one's next life but gifts to *neak ta* are meant to produce change in this one.

We can also apply the bifurcated system model within merit economics to the *wat's* dual role of housing the Great and Little traditions. The *neak ta* of Kompong Dtrou Lite was perceived as much more powerful than the one at Chum Kriel, indeed, many monks at the latter were indifferent as to its existence. During my stay I witnessed several *neak ta* ceremonies at Kompong Dtrou Lite within the context of a Buddhist ceremony but I witnessed no such service at Chum Kriel. On this point, the quote cited above most accurately describes many Khmer's feelings on the matter: "Buddhism in the city, *neak ta* in the countryside." The *wat*, closer to an urban centre, was less likely to engage in more overt displays of folk beliefs than was Kompong Dtrou Lite. This in turn was compounded by status as Chum Kriel was believed to be more solvent than others. Whereas Chum Kriel's *neak ta* shrine was nothing more than a small, beaten wooden box with a corrugated tin roof partially hidden by vegetation, Kompong Dtrou Lite's was a solid concrete structure on the *wat's* perimeter and visited often.

Klima comments that the intersubjectivity of merit-making in Thailand enables it to "absorb into its ritual form disparate entities and intentions, whether that be a

disparity between the living and the dead, or that between any other social formation and the individual intentions of the merit sharer" (2002:139). Similarly in Cambodia, Buddhists and non-Buddhists appear to share the same motivations for merit-making activities. Members of a small Christian community to the northwest of Kompong Dtrou Lite were known to attend the *wat* as well as its *neak ta* shrine in times of stress. An informant already noted in his early twenties named Wet, whose father, Saam, had escaped from the Khmer Rouge, lived with his family not far from Kompong Dtrou Lite and still visited the *wat* during festivals to gain merit for himself and family (at the request of his parents) despite their conversion to Christianity. Further, he and his brother were asked by their father to join the monastery which they refused out of disinterest. Although their father was upset that they refused to join, Buddhism and attendant folk beliefs still played a factor in their lives. They held a private *neak ta* ceremony after building a new house and their mother still prostrated herself in front of visiting monks.

In terms of donations and patronage, whether one visits a *kru* (spiritual medium), *wat*, or gives an offering to a *neak ta*, the amount and how often varies according to the individual and the desired outcome. Sweet foods are often considered the best gift as they are time consuming to make. Cigarettes and liquor are not given as gifts to monks because they violate Buddhist precepts but they can be given to *neak ta*, *bray*, and *devedas* within the *wat* (however, these donations cannot be distributed within the *vihara*). The precept against monks handling money has, for all intents and purposes, gone as the everyday practicalities of exchange makes it almost impossible to follow. The monastery, while important, is not in the same position as it once was and monks

can no longer solely survive on donations of food to sustain themselves. School, supplies, and travel are common realities and while they may receive discounts on certain things they are normally still required to pay their own way.

Monetary donations also allow monks to sustain themselves and others who may rely on the *wat* for shelter. The persistence of *kamma* in Khmer society has retained for monks their role as merit brokers justifying their exclusion from the secular labour force in exchange for spiritual labour. Their presence at major holidays, agricultural/water ceremonies, and life-cycle ceremonies facilitates the transfer of merit to the laity and increases the likelihood of a better position in the next life. Whether or not a monk comes from a 'rich' *wat* should be inconsequential in terms of their performance in this role.

An individual's choice to donate to one *wat* over another is influenced by several factors, however, an individual's perception of merit-making acts relative to another's is often based on their individual wealth. Deep-pocketed parties might patronise any *wat* as they have the means to do so but those with limited wealth will likely patronise those *wats* they have some connection with -- familial, proximal, and/or historical (i.e., one's ancestral homeland) among others. *Wats* maintain a level of self-sufficiency since giving gifts to the Buddha or one's ancestors at a *wat* will gain the most merit (as opposed to at one's home). Any conflict individuals feel in terms of which temple to patronise will affect a *wat's* gains inasmuch as they are perceived by lay individuals as being inadequate distributors of merit or less worthy of donations.

* * * * *

The numerous ceremonies and festivals found in the Khmer calendar reflect the

continued importance of rituals throughout the Cambodian countryside. Many of these events are designed to benefit the planting and harvesting of rice as well as the general accumulation of merit on the part of the participants and the continuation or restoration of harmony within a given area. These events are also important for sustaining the local Buddhist temple through which many of these events take place and where many young men from the surrounding area reside. This type of merit economics allows for the reciprocal exchange of money, material goods, and food for the creation of merit on the part of the participants. Through this exchange, one's 'merit-portfolio' increases, thus ensuring a better afterlife while sustaining a temple and its cadre of monks. Not all villagers donate to temples, however, and in the case of some villages, the lack of an active monastery can often reflect poorly on a village in the eyes of others. Further, exchange is not limited to a *wat* or monks and often includes donations to the host of entities occupying Khmer cosmology both in and outside of a temple.

The reliance on beliefs outside of canonical Buddhism is found within the religion's expression as well as within Hinduism given that the acceptance of certain beliefs does not preclude the dependence on others. When queried as to the relevance of these beliefs to everyday life, villagers and monks alike would note that folk beliefs and Hindu deities were often more relevant than canonical Buddhism. However, the separation of one from the other, while sometimes said to be '*to-ah ma'dah*' (usual), was in practice not always the case. Ceremonies calling on *neak ta* or other folk spirits for relief were often attended by local monks who would participate albeit indirectly. Even so, their participation was separate only in terms of degree or, more accurately, perception. What constituted involvement often differed according to the *wat*, its

location, and the level of knowledge on the part of monks and lay members.

The stability of a ceremony, or its relative success when measured against others, depends on the experience of the actors involved as well as environmental factors governing that stability. When success is dependent on the individual as opposed to extraneous variables, they will be held responsible and vice-versa (Heider 1950:89). This in turn affects the financial stability of a local temple. Those with knowledgeable monks or lay personnel will likely draw greater crowds thereby increasing not only the relative wealth of the community (both in terms of prestige and social welfare) but the potency of religious ceremonies. *Wats* lacking a specialised status may also lack financial gain, particularly if other local folk beliefs have wide support. However, the common strategy of individuals in need is to patronise the most widely supported belief system in a given area alongside the wider beliefs espoused within Khmer cosmology.

The difference between Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel focused less on adherence to one belief over another as it did on patronage. While the former was patronised more by rural farmers dependent on the intersection of beliefs, the latter with its 'rich' status brought with it more affluent and influential individuals tied less to the soil than to the local Buddhist hierarchy and the *wat's* wider circle of political patrons. The next chapter will cover Khmer cosmology in more detail along with its various attendant beliefs. It will also address reciprocity and gift giving between villagers and local *wats* and how it relates to the wider beliefs practiced throughout the countryside.

7. Khmer Cosmology: History, Diversity, and Change

The purpose of this thesis thus far has been an attempt to flush out the intricacies of village and temple relations as they exist within a post-war environment. The concepts of power and identity have been central to this relationship and are hallmarks of the monastery and its expression of spiritual-political authority within villages and throughout the Khmer countryside. Behind this backdrop of temple and village life lie inter and intra-personal connections between villagers and the temple, the village and larger state apparatus, and the cosmology which binds them together into a belief system governing rural, agriculturally based life.

Even though this environment is in the process of restoration and has made considerable progress given the scope and scale of societal destruction, the monastery's reconstruction has not always kept pace with other social redevelopment efforts. However, understanding the local *wat's* position and, therefore, the position of Khmer cosmology (both Great and Little aspects) is vital when attempting to analyse social, political, and economic relationships in a country with the vast majority of its population living in the countryside. Power relationships between the village and wider state often hinge upon a centralised *wat* acting as a conduit between the two which in turn requires an examination of power and identity issues within the monastery, monkhood, and wider political entities.

To this end we must first concentrate on the larger beliefs within Buddhism expressed throughout the country and broader region. Buddhism, like other world

religions, produced varying themes within the areas it was exported to, producing a backdrop for regional expression which incorporated the disparate beliefs and customs found within the cultures it was eventually to call home. The inclusion of local folk beliefs is one offshoot of this relationship between the Great and Little traditions that adopts certain macro-elements of Buddhism (Mt. Meru, for example) as the framework where micro-elements such as local deities retain a level of prominence. The destruction of these Great traditions during the DK regime requires us to ask how thorough was their removal and in what manner did certain beliefs survive and re-establish themselves as a necessary (or one can argue more traditional) method of religious expression? As the structures of the Great traditions were dismantled, how were the Little traditions of the countryside maintained within a larger cosmology that no longer had adequate specialists or temples to preserve its integrity and how relevant are they today?

These questions will be addressed along with a discussion of the study of religion within anthropology and the different forms traditional folk practices have taken throughout Southeast Asia. The numerous beliefs found within Khmer cosmology are not specific to Cambodia but part of the broader development of Buddhism regionally. Historically, this has led to the development of specialists who serve in roles often outside the purview of Buddhist monks. I will conclude by examining the importance of gift giving and reciprocal exchange; a means by which individuals interact with local spirits in an attempt to influence the course of their own lives as well as broader environmental factors outside of their control.

The Study of Folk Religious Practice in Southeast Asia

The study of belief systems within anthropology has historically centred on the dualistic nature of human symbolic interpretation. Although the term has fallen out of favour within modern anthropology, animism, first developed by Tylor (1958 [1871]), is one of the most enduring concepts in the anthropological study of religion. Tylor's work was influenced by the evolutionism of his day and the concept sought to describe the perceived 'primitiveness' of animist practitioners. Animists' belief in a "ghost soul" led to their ascribing similar souls to things around them (ibid).

The study of religion, particularly Indic traditions as practiced in rural societies, requires an understanding of the interconnectedness of beliefs that have historically tied people to agrarian ways of life dominated by environmental forces outside of their control. To this end, Evers (1972) stressed the macro-sociological approach to studying Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism and the inherent ideologies within ritual expression. Kirsch, however, found that the three components of Theravada Buddhism as practiced throughout the region (Buddhism, Hindu, and folk beliefs) are conducive for study as part of a broader synchronic structural-functional approach applicable for research on Theravada Buddhist nations (in Evers 1977:184). In his study of religious expression, Pandian (1991) attempted to move outside of this syncretism by addressing the separation of religion from the mundane as symbolising human identity's super-natural quality, free from the confines to the natural world (1991). Yet, within anthropological debate on religious acts there has been a tendency to stress either the intellectual, emotional, or ritual elements of those acts (Stringer 1999:7) although all three may be present. Guthrie (2000), however, argued that the underlying rationale for

folk beliefs is human bias: that need to see the world as social which in turn drives a desire to interact with the inanimate.

The bonds which tie individuals to religious expression are not independent of human action but require maintenance through ceremony and ritual whereby individuals engage non-human agents to affect current and future events. Eliade described this dichotomy in terms of sacred and profane time; the former expressed in similar terms re-actualised to the same degree today as its "devine gesta" (1961:69, 70). The importance of rituals is that they form one means to engage the past but also a means of alleviating anxiety about the future. In terms of power and those who benefit and depend on a religion, as long as the importance of ritual continues the longer its practitioners, specifically religious specialists, can expect to influence the laity (Suksamran 1977:11). Religious specialists, such as priests in complex societies with an intricate specialisation of labour similar to those in Southeast Asia, ensured their place as the trustees of sacred rituals and myths through their role as attendants to the king. The edicts they proclaimed may have represented different layers of religion, à la Stringer vis-à-vis Tylor, with an initial discourse that over time becomes a lecture. As such, religion and its constituent elements do not so much speak with you but talk at you.

Studying change in Chinese religious movements in western Malaysia, Lee and Ackerman use the phrase, "epistemologically individualistic" to describe those religious movements that manifest cult-like characteristics where an individual member chooses which aspects of the religion to conform to (1983:132, 133). Centralising authority would imply some sort of structure that differs from the more individualistic nature of rural animistic movements that lack an ultimate governing source. Although erecting

boundaries around an ideology with new rules may increase a leader's authority, it is contingent upon their ability to demonstrate that they have access (and more so than others) to the supernatural (1983:144). I would go further and state that the more clearly an individual can demonstrate supernatural rationale for such rules, or why they alone are privy to that rationale while others are not, the more likely their authority will go unchallenged.

Religious movements that resemble sects tend to possess "some ultimate source of authority beyond the individual member which determines what does or does not fall within the movement's ideology" (Wallis 1974:299). In less-structured and localised rural folk religious traditions such as those in Cambodia, authority emanates from the ability of specialists to demonstrate their connection with a particular spiritual element(s) in a given region. Although practitioners in other areas could be recognised as having supernatural knowledge, the likelihood of gaining popularity would be relatively small given the unlikelihood of travel. Establishing an 'ultimate source' of authority would, therefore, be regional by nature and more fragmented the further one travelled from more densely packed urban areas with larger groups of practitioners and more influential leaders.

Even so, while formalised religious traditions create defined roles and customs, groups may still be committed to ancient beliefs that have been integral to their cultural development. The lowland Lahu Nyi of northern Thailand describe themselves as Buddhist while being thoroughly committed to an animistic worldview (Walker 1986:67). Similarly, Rahman states that although the Bengali speaking Chakma of southern Bangladesh regard themselves as Theravada Buddhists, their integrated folk

and polytheist religion creates a specialised role for monks (1986:110). Spirits may have the power to cause illness but monks also have the power to treat those afflicted.

Despite this power, Rahman states that there is not much overlap in folk and Buddhist ritual (1986:118). That said, as popular folk beliefs tend to employ elements and/or symbols of various, sometimes contradictory, traditions the notion of a 'pure' belief, such as those found in early European writings on Buddhism, is not often realised (the inclusion of *neak ta* in Buddhist *wats* or the use of Buddhist icons in *neak ta* shrines, for example). Whether or not treating an illness is considered either a folk or Buddhist ritual, it seems fairly clear that the combination of a Buddhist monk treating a patient made sick by a spirit would require knowledge on the monk's part of folk rituals or at least the beliefs of the local populace.

Folk Religious Practice in Cambodia

Folk religion is maintained in at least three forms: as a tool for alleviating a variety of ailments; as a physical concept to be at times feared and consulted; and as a psychological gate-keeper between humans and the unstable wilderness while facilitating interaction between the two. Folk rituals possibly also went unchallenged (depending on location) until the increased role of the central government was able to become a significant force in people's day-to-day lives. After the destruction of Buddhism and the rise of Democratic Kampuchea in 1975, folk practices continued to play a part in the lives Khmers albeit clandestinely (see footnote twelve below). Although today there is a policy against monks performing folk rituals, they did perform them in the past. However, as seen at Kompong Dtrou Lite, monks may still be present

at such rituals.

Monks would often speak of the two roles (party to an event and participation in it) as existing side by side but they still compartmentalised them as distinct from their position as religious specialists. While viewed as separate from their normal duties within Buddhism, they accepted that such rituals have a place for popular religious expression. However, canonical segregation of rural religious practice from Buddhist cosmology does not prohibit the inclusion of those practices within the sacred space of the *wat*. Within the *wats* involved in this study the relative profanity of such practices within their sacred spaces varied with the extent resident monks were knowledgeable of Buddhism as well as their proximal relationship with the village (i.e., local or non-local) and knowledge of its practices[8].

While numerous types of spirits exist regionally, some of the more common ones known by my informants included: *neak ta*, *bong-beit* (individuals who died with a 'pure' soul), *k'mauit*, *koub*, *bray*, *aap* (a spinster whose head detaches at night and searches for victims), *m'neng p'tayh* (home guardians), and *meba* (ancestral spirits). These were generally mentioned as interacting in regular affairs. *K'mauit* (which means 'corpse') can also include *k'mauit long* (similar to Western concepts of ghosts, or those of the deceased who have either committed suicide or have been murdered), *bray* and *bay-saat*. The latter also are believed to reside in dirt or excrement and, along with *k'mauit long*, can take the shape of humans or animals (Ebihara 1968:428). Other well

8 As a historical side note, Cambodia was close to becoming a Catholic nation as the neighbouring Philippines had become. After briefly retaking Angkor in the late sixteenth century, the kingdom sought new allies in defending itself against Thailand which was regaining strength after conflict with the Burmese. An envoy was sent to the Spanish Philippines requesting military aid in return for conversion to Catholicism (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:222). The message never reached its destination.

known and powerful *neak ta* and the regions noted to acknowledge them are *Yeh Mao* (in Kampot, and western Cambodia; *Yeh* also means 'grandmother'), *Kleung Meun* (Pursat, western/central), *Yeh Tep*, *Neak Tape*, and *Ta Reach* (Angkor Wat/Siem Reap; *Ta* means 'grandfather'), *Yeh Yaot* (Pailin, the ex-Khmer Rouge stronghold in the northwest), and *Yeh Tape* (Kompong Chhnang, central). While these spirits may be known by many other names, there are also local derivations of certain *neak ta* whereas others may not be known from one region to another[9].

Spirits directly related to the *wat* include *ah-seul* and their leader *ah-sor-un* (*vihara* guardians), as well as *ah-sor-e-kay* (found inside the *vihara* surrounding the central Buddha statue). Others include *m'renh kong-vel* (guardians of animals), *bay-saat* (spirits of those who died a painful or unnatural death similar to *k'mauit*), *praet,* or *preta* in Pali (malevolent spirits similar to *bay-saat* with an elongated snout that plays a significant role during *Pchum Ben* festival), and *arak* (malevolent, usually female spirits)[10]. These spirits were also known by members of the nearby Cham community. Although the majority of the spirits were widely known, their specific role and disposition were often points of confusion for both monks and laity alike. Other spirits were sometimes mentioned in relation to *ah-seul*, *ah-sor-un,* and *ah-sor-e-kay* but in reality they were the equivalent of *devedas*.

Although *neak ta* may be called upon to cure an illness brought on by evil spirits, they may also hold the power to harm. Informants at Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite told me

9 While visiting the temple Ta Phrom in the Angkor Wat complex I overheard an elderly man ask if the *neak ta Kleung Mao* was located nearby. My companion stated that it was probably another name for *Yeh Mao* in another part of the country.

10 See Porée-Maspero, 1962a, and Ebihara, 1968, for a discussion of some of the above spirits. Although my spelling of the various names differs from Porée-Maspero, Ebihara, and others they were reached after consulting numerous English-speaking Khmers over the course of the year.

of a time when a man was killed on the *wat's* grounds when he made the *neak ta* of the temple angry. He had apparently hooked up some loudspeakers for an upcoming ceremony to a large tree in front of the *vihara*. This was the home of the *wat's neak ta* and the man failed to perform a ritual asking permission to attach the speakers. While finishing up, a loudspeaker fell to the ground striking the man who later died from his injuries. I found this curious in that the spirit brought about a death on the *wat's* grounds -- in front of the *vihara* no less. I was told by some of the older members of the *sangha* that this was not uncommon and that the *neak ta* (being the most powerful in the surrounding area) caused the accident specifically because no request was made or ritual performed.

The shrine for the *neak ta* of Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel was in the northeast corner as with most *wats* (Chouléan 1988:36). However, the *neak ta* of the local *wat* is also (usually) the defacto *neak ta* of the village it resides in and comes to be associated with large objects within and without the *wat*[11]. While food is often the gift of choice other offerings include cigarettes and alcohol. Certain spirits, having once been alive, must have sustenance provided for them in order to prevent them from causing harm, particularly during *Pchum Ben* festival honouring the dead. This holds true for spirits of family members as well. A lack of respect shown to the spirits of one's deceased parents or grandparents may make them angry and bring about misfortune.

In such cases, mediums called *snang* or *rup* who are often female (Bertrand 2001) may be asked to communicate with spirits but many times an individual may

11 For a discussion on the importance of the northeast as 'centre' within Hindu cosmology, see Good 2004.

perform an offering and prayer without their help such as in the case of mild illness. The *achar* of a *wat* can also perform folk rituals as he is not an actual monk and, therefore, not bound by Cambodian Buddhism's rule against monks performing such rites. Additional specialists include *th'mup*, or sorcerers (who are always male and can cause malevolent magic) and other mediums known as *rup arak* and *kru* (*kru* also means 'teacher' in Khmer) as well as *bong beit* who are similar to *rup arak* in that they can act as a medium for spirits but only occasionally (Ebihara 1968:433-438). Certain monks are also known to be proficient in speaking with spirits as well as certain forms of fortune-telling such as picking auspicious days for marriage.

The magical efficacy of a spirit varies according to historical precedent, status, and geographical location. For example, a *neak ta* occupying the royal palace will be seen as more powerful than one occupying a home in a small village. However, even this point may be disputed. My interviews with urbanites regarding *neak ta* and other spirits demonstrated that their knowledge was less than that of rural inhabitants, or as a woman from Phnom Penh put it, "You hear a lot of this [talk of folk beliefs] in the countryside." An assistant disagreed saying that they are especially important in the city. Indeed, a few *neak ta* shrines are present in the capital (especially residing within or next to large trees) representing particularly powerful *neak ta*. However, the symbolic and psychological importance the spirits hold in maintaining agricultural prosperity would appear to create a niche for *neak ta* in rural locations that does not exist in cities. This, however, seems to contrast with Bertrand's (2001) study of spirit mediums discussed below where he has noted an increase in mediums and their associated spirits (normally distinct from *neak ta*) within urban areas.

This phenomenon has also had broader implications. One powerful *neak ta* is that of *Kleung Meun* noted in chapter five. He is considered a *bodhisattva* ('Buddha to be') as well as a *neak ta*. During a historic engagement with the Thais in modern Pursat province, *Kleung Meun* sacrificed his own life followed by his wife and two of their children by jumping into a well dug by his soldiers in an attempt to defeat the invading force. On their death, the Thai army was overwhelmed with dysentery and had to retreat. Afterwards, a small temple was built on the site where *Kleung Meun* and his family are said to have sacrificed their lives. He is believed to reside underneath a fruit tree believed to have special powers. However, *Kleung Meun's* influence is both national and transnational in character. In Long Beach, California -- the city with the largest Khmer population in the US with over 55,000 individuals -- a *Kleung Meun* shrine has been built which carries similar significance for the Khmer immigrant population (Yamada 2004:213-225; Harris 2005:33-34).

The fortune-tellers at the shrine in Pursat are known as *haor teay* and are important for a variety of occasions. Determining lucky and unlucky days for taking trips, marriage, and construction projects historically have required visiting knowledgeable prognosticators. Consulting mediums for long trips is done by both Khmers in Cambodia and those living abroad. My informants in both Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite as well as Wat Chum Kriel told me that Khmers originally from Kampot province but living abroad would consult *haor teay* spiritualists in their countries of residence before travelling. For males, this may also include a token period of service (generally a week) in a *wat* within their family's village as an act of thanksgiving once they have successfully arrived. Seeking the advice from a folk religious specialist while

repaying Buddhism for a successful trip may seem at odds to an outside observer. However, as noted throughout, this dichotomy is academic and in reality is not something local practitioners take into account. Repaying Buddhism for a successful trip through a short service as a monk would not be open for females nor did monks express any knowledge of visiting female Khmers becoming short-term *don-chis* as an act of thanksgiving.

According to Bertrand (2001), the number of specialists (particularly exorcists) has grown post-1979 due to the conflicts that have engulfed the nation. This has created issues such as a lack of trust between individuals resulting in the reliance on spirits as intermediaries (ibid). Marston also notes the expansion of local cults after the lessening of religious restrictions post-1989 and 1991 UN sponsored elections but he does acknowledge their existence during the socialist 1980s as well (2004:170-172). The presence of *parami* (virtue, perfection, completeness) as well as their *snang* (mediums or servants) representatives, as with other *neak ta*/spirits, were not extinguished during the DK regime either[12]. Their continued presence from 1975 onward and increase post-war is perhaps indicative of their importance as a psycho-therapeutic survival tool during the period and may have gained increased importance in relation to the local *wat*, however, more research is needed.

The role of *parami* inside and outside of the monastery is important to note when discussing spirits, mediums, and various forms of magical powers post-civil war. *Parami* is a Buddhist term referring to the ten perfections or virtues of the Buddha that

12 Some of my informants were former government soldiers who noted that members of the Khmer Rouge living within the local mountains surrounding Kampot relied on certain *neak ta* for protection and often built small shrines in their honour.

allowed him to reach *nibbana*. Its popular meaning has come to mean a benevolent form of power as well as benevolent spirits who take on the persona of mythico-historical individuals who can occupy *snangs* either by force or through invitation (Bertrand 2004:151). Malevolent spirits, such as *bray* who occupy mediums, can also be transformed into *parami* when trained and pacified over time (ibid 151-152).

However, the ability of *kru parami*, or mediums, to focus *parami* for specific ends is more relevant in a discussion of magic or divination given their specialty in the field. Although some are associated with religious figures and there are monks who also act as mediums (which violates the *Vinaya*), *kru parami* are normally ordinary people who uphold Buddhist virtues and follow the precepts and *dhamma.* While they defer to the Buddha, their ability to influence *parami* through their meritorious actions is also recognised by many with even some mediums being patronised by monks for physical, spiritual, or financial support (Bertrand 2004:156-158).

Several monks at Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel described the use of special powers which certain monks had in the past and some said that there were monks today who could invoke such powers to achieve certain ends. None were noted to exist within the area but monks did describe how they would consult spirits for auspicious occasions such as funerals and weddings or to diagnose illnesses. While appearing to be outside of their normal duties, this ability to wield such forms of power, real or symbolic, has also come under the scrutiny of some politicians and ministries who associate themselves with specific temples or individuals. Even though the monks of both of the temples researched in this study did not admit to the use of magic, the association of certain temples with *parami* through iconographic images such as statues

or other building projects has been said to have increased since the end of the war (Bertrand 2004:166). The notoriety of these constructions and their associations with *parami* has also been known to attract hundreds of people in the capital and throughout the countryside.

While temple inscriptions of ancient Cambodia such as at Angkor Wat demonstrate shifting allegiances to different faiths throughout the rule of various kings, the word 'competition' would be difficult to use in reference to folk beliefs given their historical, underlying presence throughout the region. Likewise, it would be difficult to describe a case where one folk specialist was seen as a direct competitor to a belief system that includes varying aspects of different religions yet functions under the wider umbrella of Buddhism. As the two can serve different functions for specific ends (such as *neak ta* ceremonies performed for immediate relief as opposed to Buddhist ceremonies concentrating on merit for the future) yet can occupy the same physical and ceremonial space, there is not so much competition as a reliance upon their respective attributes even if not expressed by the participants (Daniels 1999).

Modern Folk Religious Expression within the Cambodian Buddhist Monastery

When speaking about the development of Cambodian Buddhism, one must keep in mind that there was not a centre of Buddhist authority linking all of the disparate temples and local traditions until the 19th century. During that time, King Ang Duong invited a Khmer monk named Pan from Wat Bovornnivet in Bangkok to Cambodia. The move brought the newly developed *Dhamayut Nikay* sect of Buddhism created in Thailand to Cambodia and along with it a strict adherence to Buddhist precepts and practice (Kobayashi 2005:493). While it enjoyed royal patronage, the *Mahanikaya* sect then, as now, still enjoyed broader support. Until the establishment of religious institutions by the French authorities in the twentieth century, Cambodian Buddhism as practiced throughout the country included different traditions and customs; Theravada Buddhism, in fact, was not established as the official state religion until after independence in 1953 (ibid).

However, broader shifts have influenced the religion's development even prior to its re-establishment post-DK regime. One of the more notable has been between the so-called *samay* and *boran*, or modern and old styles respectively. The *samay* reformist movement began in the 1910s by two monks, Samdech Chuon Nath and Samdech Huot Tath, who insisted that popular Buddhism be understood according to a strict interpretation of Buddhist texts (Kent and Chandler 2008:181). The recitation of prayers in Pali and Khmer was insisted upon as well as an understanding of the Buddhist canons over rote memorisation. They also rejected the reliance on spirits and Hindu elements within rituals (ibid).

In contrast, the *boran* custom centred on traditional Cambodian Buddhist rituals and practices and rejected these new reform measures. As Kobayashi notes in his study of a *samay* and *boran* temple in San Kor commune in Kompong Thom province, the main point of contrast today lies between the differences in Buddhist practice post-war as viewed by older and younger generations. This is particularly true for the latter who did not experience Buddhist practice pre-DK regime but Buddhism under later socialist regimes (2005:508). Young men who were ordained early in the religion's reconstruction did not benefit from older, more experienced monks to act as teachers nor did they witness traditional practices until later in their adolescence. However, Kobayashi also notes that some individuals use the term *samay* or *boran* in reference to the views of village life expressed by others, while temples that distinguish themselves as practising modern or traditional customs in reality adopt an amalgamated view of Buddhism, blending the two practices (2005:502, 512).

Regarding Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel, neither monks nor lay members expressly defined their respective temples as either *samay* or *boran*. However, the reliance on traditional practices and the importance of *neak ta* and Hindu beliefs along with the presence of memorials for the remains of victims of the Khmer Rouge demonstrate the importance of traditional practices in the region. The fact that folk rituals were more prominent at Kompong Dtrou Lite than at Chum Kriel may have been due to the level and type of patronage it experienced -- rural farmers versus wealthy and politically connected individuals. Although memorials were present at both, Kompong Dtrou Lite's use during the DK years as a stable and execution centre may have also led to the greater concentration of *neak ta* related rituals and beliefs at the temple.

As noted, even though monks are technically no longer allowed to participate in *neak ta* ceremonies outside of reciting the *dhamma*, their level and quality of participation varied according to age and location. Older monks, while knowledgeable of *neak ta* rituals, tended to know more of when and how they could and could not participate (this was found in interviews throughout several provinces). Younger monks, on the other hand, were often not as sure. Some said they could not participate while others stated they could when a certain ceremony lacked a village elder to perform "Brahmic" (in their words) rituals (this particular interview was with a 21 year old abbot in Kompong Thom province where several non-Khmer ethnic communities resided). There were also different views of what constituted a *neak ta* ceremony and the level of participation required by locals. Whereas elderly monks from Svay Rieng and Pursat province noted that younger generations participated in Buddhist ceremonies and particularly those for *neak ta*, another elderly monk from Kompong Thom lamented that younger people participated less and less in both Buddhist *and* folk ceremonies.

However, other monks would participate at different times and places. In Kompong Thom, a 34 year old abbot pointed out that when facing a natural disaster, *neak ta* water ceremonies were *first* conducted in the *vihara* where monks would recite the *dhamma* and "Ask Brahma for rain." Yet, another monk in his sixties from the ancient capital of Udong north of Phnom Penh stated that one could not conduct ceremonies within the *vihara* and monks participated only when sought out after the folk ritual part of the program concluded. Later in our conversation he also stated that during droughts, 150 monks from surrounding *wats* would climb to the top of Mt. Udong to participate in folk ceremonies requesting relief. And still another elderly monk from

Kompong Chhnang province northwest of the capital acknowledged that while *neak ta* ceremonies were not conducted in the *vihara*, if something bad were to happen within the *wat* (grounds or structures) locals would conduct a traditional ceremony to ask the local *neak ta* to restore harmony.

Although it was continually reiterated by many that *neak ta* are not technically part of canonical Buddhism but the "original" Khmer religion, when in need *neak ta* are called upon. Many times this reflected aspects of a 'last resort' type of alternative. *Neak ta* exist in nature and, therefore, when there is a disturbance within the environment *neak ta* are the logical arbiters. While stated as existing apart from canonical Buddhism, it is not separate from the Buddhist *wat* or the religion's daily expression.

After numerous discussions with the monks of Kompong Dtrou Lite about the most powerful *neak ta* within the southwestern corner of the province where Prey Thom commune is located, the following list developed:

1. *Yeh Mao*
2. *Ja-Srop/M'jeh Srok*: Generic name for *neak ta* covering a home up to the general area around it.
3. *Dom Poh*: A local *neak ta* between Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel.
4. *Dom Som Raum*: Located two kilometres north of Kep in a small concrete shrine.
5. *Dta Mok*: The local *neak ta* for Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and the surrounding village.

I then asked young men of similar age (early to mid-twenties) from Prey Thom commune living near Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite but who have never served as monks the

same question which resulted in a different hierarchy[13]:

1. *Yeh Mao*
2. *Ka Kaio*: Prey Thom commune.
3. *Ja Srop*
4. *Dom Poh*: Covering the area between Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel.
5. *Dom Ch'reh*: Said to exist in the local mountains overlooking Kep (in the general vicinity).
6. *Dom Som Raum*: Two kilometres north of Kep.
7. *M'Jeh Srok/Dta Mok*
8. *Gah-Grahom*: Near Mt. Bokor, the tallest mountain in Cambodia north of Kampot town[14].

Cambodian Buddhism can be thought to exist as a separate sphere within the larger environment. Technically divisible, these spheres are connected through physical constructions, the most apparent being the local *wat*. These constructions bridge the gap between the two spheres so that when there is a disturbance within the *wat* and, therefore, the environmental space where Buddhism is given physical shape, the vehicle for regaining harmony would be *neak ta*. Regaining balance on that physical plane would be necessarily done through *neak ta* and not Buddhism as the latter, while influencing social harmony, does not operate with the same level of efficacy in controlling the environment (such as rain and harvests).

13 Discrepancies for both groups varied according to age, sex, education, occupation (agricultural, trade, or urban employment), location (similar to occupation), family size, experience under the Khmer Rouge, size of the *wat*/number of monks, local history of an area, devotion to Buddhism, and experience with the monastery.

14 *Gah-Grahom* was offered as another powerful *neak ta* near Mt. Bokor, a fair distance away from Prey Thom commune. It was not feared due to its association with the mountain as opposed to the local area, however, if one were to venture to the mountain's summit they would be expected to provide an offering.

The space that temples occupy is sacred as it acts as a bridge between the continued existence of one (*neak ta*/other folk spirits) while increasing its status as a necessary support for another (Buddhism). The inclusion of a third (Hindu beliefs) completes the triad of Khmer cosmology. Iconographic imagery allows for the incorporation of Hindu deities within the *wat* as well as intertwining them with Buddhism as they are expressed throughout the *vihara* and *salaa* (the two buildings that normally house these depictions). While these two traditions are regularly depicted within a *wat's* buildings, they can also be in the form of statues already noted such as the *garuda* (‘*kroot*’ in Khmer), a powerful bird ridden by Vishnu that can destroy *nagas*, and monkey gods reminiscent of *Hanuman* from the *Reamker*, the Cambodian version of the Ramayana (Zepp 1997:9). *Neak ta*, however, generally remain outside the *vihara* and the *salaa* except for special occasions. Their proximity to one another also relates to their respective duties: the figure of *Hanuman* can be found within some *wats* guarding the entrance gate while the *neak ta* shrine in the northeast corner protects the grounds within the *wat's* gate.

Hindu Beliefs within Khmer Mythology/Cosmology

As Cambodian Buddhism became more developed through the increased interaction with monasteries in Thailand, Laos, and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) it also "sank roots," into the country through, "integrating traditional beliefs while also reinterpreting them" (Kent and Chandler 2008:20). This harmonisation of "Brahmanistic heritage and Theravadin ideology," was reflected in the construction of Angkor which in turn came to function as an emerging site of Buddhist ritual and act as a symbol of Khmer royalty (Edwards 2007:23). The place of various Hindu beliefs within this emerging religion stems from their role as the historical antecedent of Buddhism while incorporating many aspects of popular indigenous beliefs, the latter influencing and influenced by Hindu beliefs (Beteille 1998:190). In any given *wat* one can find imagery of Hindu deities within both the communal *salaa* and sacred *vihara* while popular folk rites may (but not necessarily) include Hindu symbols and/or foci of worship. However, while Buddhism remains the state religion, its status shares, with popular folk beliefs, the iconic symbolism of Hindu imagery.

This imagery continues to hold a space due to its foundational status within Buddhism and the shared concepts it espouses (*kamma*, *samsara*, etc.). Popular folk religion benefits from its ability to incorporate Indic imagery and beliefs found within the state religion while remaining 'non-Buddhist' (in the sense that the two are conceptualised as different while still sharing the same common space). Hindu beliefs, therefore, act as that connection point in the broader cosmological machine. Their outsider status facilitates the connection of two, theoretically, discrete entities while maintaining a harmonic balance between what the village believes to exist and what the

state determines is to officially exist.

There are several examples of this in historic Khmer mythology. One is of the legendary figure of *Rahu* mentioned in chapter five. The ravenous being attempts to devour the sun and moon causing an eclipse until the two quickly tell Vishnu of his actions. After *Rahu* touches the liquor of immortality, *amrita*, originally produced during the ancient Hindu myth of the 'Churning of the Sea of Milk', Vishnu hurls his discus at the beast cutting off its head and creating the being *Ketu* from its tail. Vishnu thus adds to Vedic astrology creating the two invisible planets: the ascending lunar node of *Rahu* and the descending lunar node of *Ketu*. Unable to rejoin yet immortal from the *amrita*, they are forced to wander the Zodiac for eternity. When one of the two finds the sun or moon it attempts to consume them only to be stopped by the intervention of the Buddha who forces them to flee in subservience (Hackin et. al. 1963:198, 199):

> *Rahu* occupies a place in Cambodian mythology that is above everything decorative, without any very definite religious character; no worship is paid to him, and his legend has more or less disappeared from memory. He remains an ornamental motive very often used in the modern decoration of the pediments of pagodas (Hackin et. al. 1963:198, 199).

Evers goes a step further in his analysis of Sinhalese Buddhism with its corresponding *vihara* (Buddhist), *Devale* (temple of gods), and *Palace Systems* and their contrasting values institutionalised in a manner such that their "outward form and social organization are 'parallel' and 'supplementary'" (1977:185). On a village level, religious power is manipulated through the use of magic. However, on a state level power is manipulated via the Palace System "through the charisma of the deva raja, the god-king" (ibid 183). Evers' approach is top down in that it focuses on the royal temple as the central institution of power. This differs, as Evers notes, from most anthropologists who

at the time argued primarily from a village point of view (ibid).

Within Cambodian Buddhism as in other Hindu and Buddhist nations one finds similar structures as well as practitioners dedicated to them. However, I would not draw such a hard and fast comparison particularly regarding whether each one constitutes a separate system given that most Khmers patronise both. In regard to Evers' Palace System reflecting what Ames (1964) called, "magical animism" as a system of power at the state level, we need to ask to what extent these ideas still resonate within the Khmer view of royalty and the religious institutions associated with them? The 'royal' *neak ta* of the palace is *Don Kaa* and is considered the national *neak ta* and one of if not the most powerful. *Kra Ham Kor* and *Preah Chaothe* with their respective statues in front of the Royal Palace are protectors of *Don-kaa* yet are not associated with a particular region (Bertrand 2001:36).

Hindu symbolism still persists at the state level: the King's entourage of Brahman priests or *Bakus* within the royal court continues to conduct ceremonies. Their place in the royal court is also re-established annually in the foretelling of events for the coming year such as in the Royal Ploughing Ceremony to determine the upcoming harvest. The integration between Ames' magical animism and Hindu beliefs at the state level as distinguished from magical animism and Buddhism is difficult to define. While the former two are represented by Brahman priests who continue to hold a hereditary line, the latter two are represented by Buddhist monks who, while serving in specific rites of the court, to some degree our trumped by the 'Other' of Hindu beliefs. While not necessarily holding a mundane place, monks (as representatives of the state religion) do not have the same level of historical ties that Brahman priests hold, particularly when

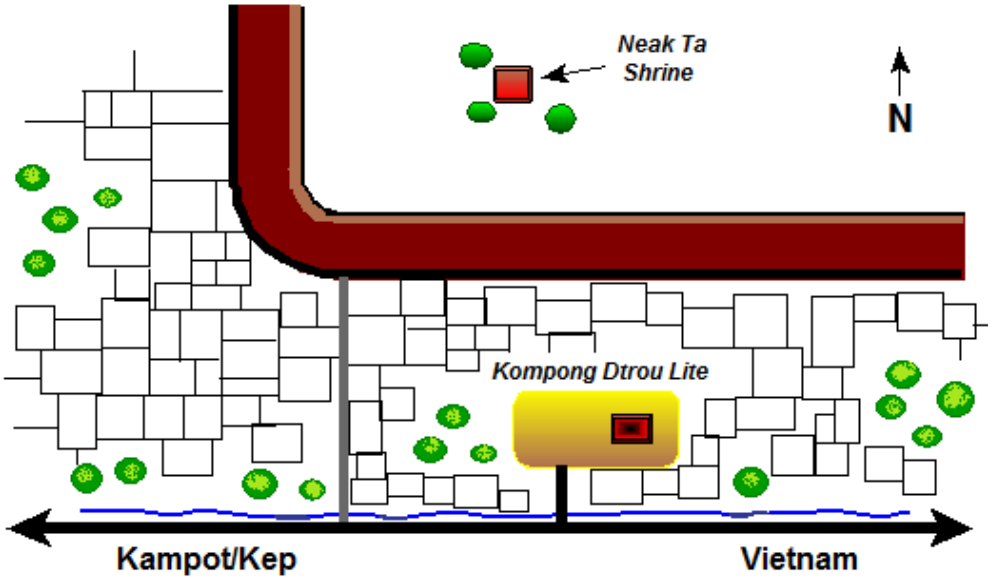
the national symbol of the kingdom (Angkor Wat) continues to house Vishnu and Siva cults.

The Role of the Great and Little within Khmer Cosmology

As seen, spirit shrines do not occupy a static role but are engaged as go-betweens in placating *neak ta* and/or asking for protection or relieving illness. In this regard, folk religion serves a function that Buddhism does not necessarily fulfil (aside from the ubiquitous quest for luck). Buddhism, fulfilling a highly ceremonial and social role, requires specific actors (i.e., monks or *achars* and *don-chis*) and a more vertical reciprocity as donations are given to monks who in turn will bless the donor/donation facilitating the creation of merit. This differs from a horizontal type of reciprocity where a single actor may engage a local *neak ta* without the participation of specialised actors. In this regard, it is a much more private engagement that may take place on an ad-hoc basis with little expenditure by the individual participating in the rite.

Neak ta shrines are not reserved for *wats* or auspiocious places alone but can also come under government influence as do the ceremonies to engage their potency over a given area. One example in Prey Thom commune demonstrates at least the semi-official recognition of local religious practices and their perceived influence on government activities. One afternoon Loak Poun and I along with three other monks made our way over to the large dam approximately 200m north of Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite. The dam was originally constructed under the Khmer Rouge by the local villagers, many of whom recounted their forced construction of it and the high mortality rate of workers due to exhaustion (both of Loak Poun's parents were forced to work on the dam). After

the fall of the DK regime the newly established PRK government decided to keep the dam which has been functioning ever since.



The earthen dam is 'L' shaped and sits amidst rice fields and elevated houses nearby and contains fields within its eastern half. It receives water from the mountains further afar which saw intense fighting as the holdout for the Khmer Rouge until the late 1990s (and as noted in the first chapter, was also the site where three Western backpackers were killed by the Khmer Rouge in 1994). In the western bend of the dam there are two cement drainage ditches dispersing water as allocated by the local water authority. The dam is dry for most of the year only to fill up during the rainy season. The most obvious feature of the dam is a large cement structure towards the centre. Measuring 3.5m x 3.5m it was the largest *neak ta* structure that I had ever seen. As we made our way towards the structure I noticed that it had statues of the Buddha within it. Loak Poun explained that while they were statues of the Buddha they symbolised the

neak ta housed within as well as being personal adornments for aesthetic purposes. Offerings of incense candles and rice wine were also present.

The structure's place within the dam, while at first glance rather odd, did have religious and social significance. A Buddhist *wat* resided on the same spot prior to the Khmer Rouge who subsequently destroyed it and carted off the materials for other building projects. After 1979, as the new PRK government decided to keep the dam, the *neak ta* structure was built in the former *wat's* place and is now under the control of the local Water Authority of the province whose officials bring offerings to it every *T'ngai Seul*. When there has been a disturbance at the dam and the officials feel that the *neak ta* needs to be appeased, the monks from Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite are asked to go over along with the lay individual charged with the *neak ta* structure's upkeep. Loak Poun attended one such service where the abbot of Kompong Dtrou Lite was asked to chant the *dhamma* prior to the *neak ta* service. Traditional music was played to coax the *neak ta* to possess the man in control of the structure so it might relate through him any problems that might have developed.

When I asked what influence (or power) the *neak ta* held over the area Loak Poun replied that "*Neak ta* in my *wat* helps them there. *Neak ta* in the dam lets people have water and can destroy houses." The previous year the dam burst close to the western bend flooding the entire area to the south and southwest. The flood killed numerous chickens and pigs belonging to locals and created general havoc with the rice crop. The flood was believed to be the result of the *neak ta* growing angry with the surrounding villages. It was also believed that if water within the dam ever rose to the point of touching the structure (which sat upon an elevated part of the dam's interior) the

neak ta would grow angry and cause destruction once again. Another event the year before involved a man from Kompong Cham province in the southeast of the country who was working on the dam. While driving a tractor near the site he was said to have disrespected the *neak ta* who subsequently caused an accident in which he died. Although the monks did not know what he did exactly to disrespect the *neak ta*, it was widely believed by locals that he must have done something to upset the spirit as it was the only logical conclusion they could reach as to why he had died.

Even though it was once the site of a Buddhist *wat*, its subsequent destruction and the later construction of the *neak ta* shrine in its place followed the symbolism of these two prongs of Khmer religion: while the Buddha and *wat* do not cause harm, others such as *neak ta*, *ah-seul*, and *bray* can. The destruction of the *wat* did not subtract from any sacredness attached to the soil upon which had it stood. Indeed, the fact that the *neak ta* now resides on the spot reflects Chouléan's analysis of *neak ta* as connected with the soil (1988). I enquired as to whether the *neak ta* residing at the space now is the same one that resided at the previous *wat*. Although the answer was not known, it may have been associated with the general area on which the *wat* had stood and, thus, took on the location when it was decided to build the shrine.

This may reflect a type of 'sacredness by association' of the *neak ta* with the former Buddhist temple. The *neak ta* may be connected to the former *wat* by way of association to the soil on which it had formerly stood and, therefore, may have been the logical choice for the shrine given the amount of lives lost in the dam's construction -- a *wat* being a vehicle for the creation of *kamma* affecting one's future existence and *neak*

ta being a representation of the potential for harm. The table on the following page lists the various attributes associated with Buddhism, Hindu and folk beliefs, and the conditions under which they find common associations. However, it is not meant to be representative of the country as a whole. It is meant to show how Cambodian cosmology is formalised and implemented through demonstrative symbols and practices and the associations that are built up over time between *wats* and other sacred sites and the attendant traditions practiced by those who patronise them.

	Buddhism	Hindu Beliefs	Folk Beliefs
Ad hoc			X
Hierarchical	X	X	
Throne	X	X	X*
City	X	X	**(X)**
Village	X	X	X
Nature			X
Public	X	X	**(X)**
Personal **			X
Individual ***	X	X	X
Sacred (space) +	X	X	**(X)**
Profane (space) +			X
Fluid (space) +	X	X	X
Static (space) +			X
Foreign	X	X	
Indigenous			X
Timeless (structured) ++	X	X	
Timeless (unstructured) ++			X
Specialists (formal)	X	X	
Specialists (informal)			X

* Although *neak ta* exist within the Royal Palace and near royal residences, their association was not as pervasive as with nature/villages among my informants.

****** "Personal" is defined as the ability to engage spirits without necessarily needing to enter a specific *wat* or shrine as well as a belief in one's own *neak ta*. While one can engage in merit-making activities to increase one's *kamma* anywhere, conducting Buddhist or Hindu related rites often requires entering a defined sacred space. However, the line is a fine one as the use of different aspects of traditions varies depending upon those conducting the rituals, purpose behind them, and area they are conducted in (e.g., a greater use of Hindu symbolism in one area over another).

*** "Individual" is defined as the ability to engage a tradition for a person's sole benefit as opposed to the community.

(X) Neak *ta* and other local spirits can and do operate within these respective spheres, however, I would define their presence as more peripheral physically (structures) and collectively (rituals) with respect to Buddhism and/or Hindu beliefs.

\+ Sacred and profane space refers to where the beliefs are commonly associated (i.e., a Buddhist *wat*). Fluid and static space refer to the geographical location which a belief is normally associated. A *wat* may be destroyed or relocated but *neak ta* are associated with a general area and perceived to have influence over that area as opposed to other *neak ta*. However, the more powerful a *neak ta* is believed to be the greater the sphere of influence it commands.

++ "Timeless" refers to either *structured* doctrine (*samsara*, *anatta*, *kamma* -- 'rebirth') or *unstructured* position in relation to other traditions (folk beliefs held as the 'original' Khmer religion). As Boyer states, "There is no such thing as early animism and anthropomorphism, and therefore nothing to 'return' to" (1996:89).

The involvement of the Great and Little traditions as part of a villager's everyday life can be seen in the treatment of various ailments attributed to folk spirits. According to the office of the Ministry of Cults and Religions in Kampot province, one common remedy for an illness believed to be brought on by *neak ta* involves taking a green coconut shell filled with sticky rice (*bai-bro-lung*) to a local *wat* as part of a monk's diagnosis (this same offering is used in various Hindu related ceremonies as well). After the monk examines the individual's face and consults a deck of cards he will then speak with the *neak ta* for the adequate remedy (the diagnosis differs from *wat* to *wat*).

The *neak ta* determines in what direction the individual must take the offering and where to place it for a prescribed period of time. If the offering is consumed by someone before the prescribed time has elapsed it is thought that bad luck will befall them. However, if a child comes across the offering and eats it, their mother may ask the diagnosing monk to intervene and ask the *neak ta* to refrain from bringing any harm to anyone. Although this would seem to run counter to the prohibition against monks being involved in folk rituals, where the line (if there even is a line) is drawn depends to a great extent on the knowledge of both the monk(s) and individuals involved. The fact that this information was related by the Ministry of Cults and Religions indicates that at least some monastic involvement is expected or at least tolerated.

As this common remedy demonstrates, the inward expectation that all three traditions may (should?) be involved in the broader practical application of Khmer cosmology does not reflect the outward segregation that many (such as monks) express when describing Cambodian Buddhism. However, the inclusion of these other traditions is reasonable in that all, on some level, may be utilised during "sacred time", or a re-

creation of that time long ago when the rituals were first performed by a god, ancestor, or hero (Eliade 1954:21). Although sacred time does not always have to refer to creation, participants may have an expectation that all of the elements are required to achieve maximum efficacy through the suspension of "profane time" (ibid 76): a profanity that is collectively held yet varies in importance to individual practitioners.

*****

Khmer folk religion, as with any belief system, is a compilation of rules, formulae, and theories adopted over time through interaction with the surrounding environment. In overwhelmingly rural societies there may be the added catalyst of uncertainty in regard to the natural environment. Irregular bouts of rain, drought, or the fear of the unknown commonly represented as the forest may require supernatural intervention by villagers to maintain stability or prevent calamity. However, placating the multitude of spirits would be almost impossible as they vary from region to region. Although *neak ta* and other spirits are at times associated with malevolent acts, they may also be called upon to heal an illness or alleviate some other type of ailment.

The continuity of folk beliefs within Cambodian Buddhism is part of the larger tradition of court religions balanced and built upon the existing beliefs of local practitioners. The regalia of court rituals varies from that of the countryside with its continued use, if perhaps only ceremonially, of Hindu elements. The Brahman *Bakus* of the royal court demonstrate on one level the importance of other traditions in shaping an individual's worldview but on another their relative distance from that of rural life. Ritual remains one of the main vehicles in demonstrating the connection between the environment and future events. More importantly it demonstrates the unknown for rural

Khmer society. The unknown, forest, or *prei* symbolises that aspect of Khmer life that is out of one's control. The role of mediating specialists (folk or Buddhist monk) in translating the unknown through ritual, thus, making the unknown known, or at least something practitioners can begin to understand, differs according to the ritual and specialist although their actions can exist side by side as well as overlap.

Girad wrote that when groups search for surrogate victims it is an example of the wider society "seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificeable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect" (1972:4). Could destroying the representatives of Buddhism mean that the religion was truly stamped out? Further, if one conducts a folk ritual associated with Buddhism does one, therefore, practice a form of Buddhism or only that particular folk ritual? Context, motivation, and expectation would surely be factors but so too would be an individual's knowledge of a religion. Rituals would likely change on the individual level given the lack of those educated in its practice and would come to reflect a different form of the religion. Indeed, during the DK regime Khmers reported retreating into themselves and refraining from all acts of self-expression (Etcheson 2004:15). Rebuilding oneself would not only be a challenge for society but for the *sangha* as it attempted to provide survivors with a meaningful belief system similar to that which had been destroyed.

However, the persistence of beliefs continued under the DK regime. While many former soldiers who fought against the Khmer Rouge brushed off Buddhism, folk beliefs, and religion in general as 'crazy', government and Khmer Rouge soldiers made extensive use of tattoos and amulets as a means of protecting themselves from harm.

This practice continues to be performed today by Khmer and Thai soldiers near the disputed Preah Vihear temple complex claimed by both Cambodia and Thailand (The Phnom Penh Post, 11 Nov. 2008). Former soldiers who fought in the local mountains also related a story of a large spirit shrine that government and Khmer Rouge soldiers would patronise during the 1990s. The reliance on folk beliefs in place of Buddhism is understandable for the Khmer Rouge who were from the countryside and brought up within the tradition of local spirits controlling the environment in which they lived.

Lacking the formal education of the cities and indoctrinated with the ideology of the Khmer Rouge -- particularly in reference to targeting 'traditional' authority figures such as parents, government officials, educated individuals, and monks -- beliefs that served practical ends (such as protecting one from harm) may have appeared to be acceptable to Khmer Rouge cadre. Practising such rituals would not necessarily lead to a group being singled out for 'feeding off' of society as folk beliefs lacked the hierarchy of Buddhism with its specialised practitioners separated from, and relying on, the larger community. Further, the new society was to be built upon agriculture which historically relied on spirits tied to the soil.

One could postulate that given the experience of the Khmer Rouge and their desire to rid society of education and the trappings of traditional sources of authority, the reliance on folk beliefs may have increased as uncertainty and chaos grew once the killings and domination of Angkar increased. However, initially some Khmers cited the lessening of the spirit world's power. Luco notes that people seeing their fellow Khmers treating others so badly without being punished for it may have weakened the belief in spirits, subsequently lessening their perceived strength (2002:80). Even so, as the Great

and Little traditions began to regain their former status the difference in their importance varied between urban and rural, and between structured contexts (Buddhism with a recognised hierarchy) and unstructured contexts (folk beliefs with no central authority). Whether or not this is reflected in the current growth of spirit mediums cited above is not known at this time and requires further research.

It would seem reasonable, though, that attempts to dismantle belief systems so ingrained in the Khmer psyche could never fully come to pass. The number of *achars* left throughout the country could have assured that at least some knowledge, even if diminished or lacking in some way, survived. The differential level of 'freedom', particularly in the Eastern Zone, allowed for some activities to still be practiced even if in secret or with a blind eye turned by high-ranking Khmer Rouge cadre. However, as Ciorciari and Chhang note, it was "…very likely that all CPK leaders knew of the plan to eliminate the Buddhist monkhood. There is no evidence that any high-ranking CPK official took countervailing action on behalf of the monks" (2005, 264-5).

Although individuals were intimidated from giving alms and the eventual dismantling of the religion would occur, local folk beliefs would be nearly impossible to abolish. A man-made structure such as a temple could be physically removed but how would it be possible to remove a *neak ta* that resided in/on a mountain or general area of land? Even if a *neak ta* may be associated with a large object, such as a distinctive tree, the object's destruction would not mean that the *neak ta* is somehow destroyed. Indeed, examples from Kep demonstrate that *neak ta* can occupy a different place for different individuals as well as switch associations (Yeh Mao was reported to live in front of King Sihanouk's former residence as well as the large mountain directly behind it).

Even so, the question of the whether or not folk beliefs were officially allowed during the DK regime should be raised. The Khmer Rouge's hyper-nationalistic fervour produced a climate of distrust and hatred of all things foreign regardless of their connection with the country. Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham, hill tribes and the beliefs historically connected with them were also subject to attack since they were not 'true' Khmer beliefs. The notion of 'Base People' as the 'real Khmers' -- rural peasants who were to become the leaders of local cadre -- would lead one to conclude that their local folk (or 'true'?) beliefs would be seen as 'real Khmer' beliefs and, therefore, tolerated or at least overlooked in an otherwise Communist state. Two chapters and their corresponding articles of the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea address the issue of religion, the first in a generalised manner, the second directly:

> **Chapter Nine, Article 12, Rights and Duties of the Individual**
>
> Every citizen of Kampuchea enjoys full rights to a constantly improving material, *spiritual* (my emphasis), and cultural life.
>
> **Chapter Fifteen, Article 20, Worship and Religion**
>
> Every citizen of Kampuchea has the right to worship according to any religion and the right not to worship according to any religion.
>
> Reactionary religions which are detrimental to Democratic Kampuchea and Kampuchean people are absolutely forbidden (the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea, 5 Jan. 1976).

The right to worship was constitutionally protected, in theory. Chapter Nine, Article Twelve, mentions the broader issue of spirituality even if lacking a definition as to what spiritualism is or is not. Chapter Fifteen, Article Twenty, addresses religion directly, however, the ambiguous wording of the last paragraph in Article Twenty provides the basis for later atrocities regarding disparate beliefs along with the Buddhist order. "Reactionary religions" that are "detrimental" to the state requires us to ask what

is considered reactionary? If we define reactionary as opposition to progress then any belief system following historical traditions (particularly those connected with past regimes) would, by definition, be opposed to the progress sought by the hyper-Marxist ideology of the Khmer Rouge. Mixed within the amalgamation of beliefs of the region (Hindu, Buddhist, and folk) the eventual dominant religion of Theravada Buddhism was ingrained in the Monarchy as well as later governments following independence from France.

Being the 'official' state religion of a government the Khmer Rouge were attempting to topple, it would logically come under greater scrutiny as a reactionary belief. Authority flowed down to the local village that, although governed by local leaders, traditionally revolved around the goings on of the temple as the local social, religious, and often political centre. Monks, while technically separate from politics, had a great deal of clout with locals given their perceived independence from the government, education (ability to read and transmit information), and role as religious specialists. Their independence put them outside of the 'workers' of Democratic Kampuchea (i.e., the general population) while being educated among a rural populace with a generally poor education and high illiteracy rate put them in the same league as the 'New People' of the cities. Further, as they were prohibited from doing physical labour they also represented a potential economic loss.

Harris (2008) cites this as one of the main reasons for the religion's ultimate destruction, "Since monastic rules do not allow the *sangha* to work, their simple incorporation into the realm of economic activity was sufficient to bring about their dissolution. Once the *sangha* had been removed lay Buddhist practice had lost its *raison*

d'être and the religion's almost complete destruction became inevitable" (232-233). An institution with personnel that did not have to perform physical labour and were the traditional bearers of knowledge and political influence presented a direct threat in a country with over 80-85% of the population living in the countryside. Thus, in today's parlance, monks represented 'sleeper cells' of potential competitors to the Khmer Rouge's ultimate goal of complete social domination. As the new state sought to create an agrarian society, (indeed, creating 'Year Zero' and starting history anew) the destruction of Buddhism would strategically be the most cogent plan.

The first line in Article 20 perhaps is more telling than at first glance, "…and the right *not* (my emphasis) to worship according to any religion." A state religion would suggest that it is not only the religion of the masses but the default religion. Intrinsically tied to a state overthrown by a regime opposed to 'reactionary' beliefs emphasising that one does not have to believe in anything (outside the regime's goals) put the local rural temple on even keel with secular authority. And since Angkar was infallible any ideology with deviating views (religious or otherwise) *must* be reactionary: "Useless to argue for the Angkar's motives are perfectly pure"; "The Angkar is the people's brain"; "Let us commit ourselves to follow the way of the Angkar"; "Be grateful to the Angkar"; "The Angkar is the mother and father of all young children, as well as all adolescent boys and girls"; "Comrades, the Angkar already knows your entire biography" (Locard 2004:109, 110, 117, 123). As this sample of Khmer Rouge slogans shows, the drive behind the DK regime's central authority was to create the amorphous ubiquity of 'Angkar' -- a central authority with boundless reach and indefinable powers. In this respect Angkar was to replace Buddhism as the belief of the masses; a new quasi-

religion compelling obedience with its inherent omnipotence and presence as if it had always existed.

How different was this from the monastic order and Buddhism? Two more slogans, "The Angkar has (the many) eyes of the pineapple," and "The Angkar is the soul of the motherland," appear to characterise the sempiternity of Angkar (Locard 2004:112, 104). As Locard remarks, "It remains curious that a revolution proclaiming to be anti-religious characterised the Party as a 'soul', by definition an invisible, supernatural, and godlike essence" (ibid 104). In some ways the methods of the Khmer Rouge attempted to present their own cosmological model -- the presence of an omnipotent authority whose powers of perception did not waver just as the multi-faced towers of the Bayon temple that gazed over its subjects. The latter could 'see' the actions of Angkor's population and project merit, stemming from the king's image, upon all it gazed. The former could 'see' the actions of peasants as well but in a faceless manner to mark *demerit*.

While monks were not necessarily the enforcers of Buddhist precepts, they were the representatives of the ideal behaviour the precepts promulgated. Angkar's representatives, on the other hand, were the enforcers of correct behaviour dictated by Angkar. While the web of Angkar spread, it appeared to act independently of its representatives tasked with enforcing the precepts of this new institutional *devarãja* whose authority/soul was latent within the land and the foundation of Cambodia's new history beginning with Year Zero.

I would propose that given the destruction of Buddhism, folk rituals persisted to some degree and took on new meanings in the absence of physical representations of the

Great tradition. As many folk rituals could be conducted in secret, it would be almost impossible to completely erase them. Such examples include traditional wedding ceremonies conducted clandestinely after a couple's marriage was arranged by Angkar (Locard 2004:268). Others, however, were publicly acknowledged such as a revolutionary marriage dance that was an amalgamation of Khmer ritual and Marxist hyperbole with, "fists held high towards the heavens in a 'dance of the possessed'" (ibid).

As seen, attempts to destroy beliefs connected to the soil held by an overwhelmingly rural people would seem almost futile. The continued use of spirit shrines by Khmer government soldiers and the Khmer Rouge for protection demonstrates that during the DK regime folk beliefs continued to hold a status and fulfill functions that Buddhism could not (particularly in the conduct of war). The continued reliance on folk beliefs in the construction of infrastructure and as a coping mechanism during times of stress suggests that they retained their traditional place within both the sacred and profane of Khmer society. Indeed, the current growth of spirit mediums (Bertrand 2001) and the reliance on them post-1979 may suggest that the use of folk beliefs has increased. As will be seen below, the daily use of folk symbols and practices within current Buddhist practice has meant that the reconstruction of Buddhism and the Buddhist monastery did not restart from where it had left off. Instead it had to re-emerge in the light of depleted Buddhist knowledge, specialists, and literature alongside the continued reliance on folk beliefs and their importance in the absence of competing ideologies.

8. Conclusion

The rural Buddhist monastery in Cambodia has undergone a historical shift unseen in other parts of the world given its experience under the Democratic Kampuchea government of the Khmer Rouge. The attempted annihilation of a religion that has held sway over people's lives for centuries in a few short years did away with knowledgeable clergy as well as an expansive literary tradition that, in many ways, cannot be replaced. What this excision resulted in differed given the unbalanced promulgation of the Khmer Rouge's hyper-Marxist ideology. Within some areas of the country clandestine religious services were conducted while in others, many former *achars* and defrocked monks came to represent some of the cruellest and most violent overseers. Yet, while the Khmer Rouge were successful in turning many young Khmers against the traditional idea of service in the monastery (indeed, the concept of religion in general) there remained the latent 'original' religion of Cambodia in the form of local folk beliefs and their perceived relevance in a time of social implosion.

Although the idea of service within the monastery has shifted due to its ruin and at times haphazard reconstruction, some continuity remains. Education, social advancement, and merit are still active elements guiding many young men choosing to serve. That said, the local *wat* has lost its traditional position in the eyes of many Khmers as the main vehicle of Khmer cosmology. This is partially due to the monastery's destruction and the lack of knowledge on the part of many younger Khmers of Buddhism's historic place within Khmer society -- particularly rural society – but also due to the failure by the government to educate younger generations regarding the

events leading up to the Pol Pot regime. Added to this is the ability of travel due to the increase in infrastructure which allows for greater access to the countryside as well as a retreat from it.

This movement and integration of isolated communities has also been combined with the efforts by the Cambodian and prior Vietnamese political powers to eradicate potential resistance to reconstruction efforts. The government was slow to re-establish the local *wat* in part because of the ongoing civil war and reconstruction efforts, but also because of the potential it had to influence the opinions and views of local villagers. The People's Republic of Kampuchea government established by the Vietnamese after their invasion and subsequent occupation could not afford to have a challenge to its authority given that its authority was tenuous at best.

According to Wolf, a defining feature of peasant life is its integration within the larger state (1966:11). The more succeeding governments reintegrated previous institutions destroyed by the Khmer Rouge, the more those governments could reach those displaced by the ongoing conflict; especially if that reintegration was seen as driven by them and not the Vietnamese occupiers. However, the more a *wat*/village/commune and ultimately province can be integrated through an extension of political influence, the more they will lose in way of autonomy. For local *wats* this integration can also result in a diminished, if not muted, role they play as vehicles for expressing the social concerns of rural villagers.

As Etcheson notes, the usurpation of power by the Khmer Communists depended on the management of myth and control of its two pivotal sources in the eyes of Khmer peasants: the monarchy and monastery (1984:149). The PRK regime revived the

monastery and became its de facto patron exerting influence over its rate of reconstruction, the rehabilitation of the *sangha*, and its level of authority throughout the countryside. Currently, political patronage has given certain *wats* greater power and influence compared to others, however, the reconstruction of the monkhood via the ruling government has also silenced (to an extent) any potential voice of political dissent it would otherwise enjoy.

Summary of Arguments:

Power and Identity

Although many authors in the past have been dismissive of French efforts in the country in comparison with Vietnam, the French did attempt to bring about changes and expand education for broader segments of the populace. These efforts, though, met with resistance stemming from the monarchy to the monastery as many Khmers resented the idea of foreign intrusion into their traditional way of life. New French run schools met with opposition from parents as many were staffed with Vietnamese teachers, and monks given the schools' challenge to the monastery's traditional role in educating young Khmer males. Practical trades and the French language were introduced into the curriculum and compulsory attendance was required for children living near French run schools, some of which had a section for girls. Monks were historically seen as purveyors of knowledge and with this went an element of political power. Reports of monks performing secret rituals as a form of resistance were reported while *nak sel*, or holy men, were also involved in engaging millenarian strains of Buddhism in their opposition to foreign influences.

Religious activities became more robust towards the end of the nineteenth century and at times focused on millenarian movements but these were not always anti-colonial in nature. Dissatisfaction with taxes and other economic woes rallied many to causes they saw as having the ability to alleviate their state of affairs. In many ways they demonstrated the willingness of Khmers to turn to certain religious traditions other than Buddhism in difficult times. Several of these movements envisioned a revitalisation of Khmer society with the coming of Maitreya, the *bodhisattva* believed to arrive on Earth when Buddhism is close to being extinguished. What these various groups had at their core, however, was disdain for the expansion of French colonial administration. These reflected the broader changes Cambodian Buddhism was experiencing, particularly with the arrival of the *Dhamayut Nikay* sect from Thailand and its strict adherence to Buddhist precepts and practice followed by later indigenous efforts by Khmer monks (Kobayashi 2005:493). These activities included the reformist *samay* (modern) movement which challenged the *boran* (old) style of worship; the former insisted on an understanding of the Buddhist canons over memorisation and the exclusion of Hindu and other spirits, whereas the latter retained those practices and traditions within Cambodian Buddhism.

The far reaching influence of these three aspects of Khmer cosmology -- Buddhist, Hindu, and folk beliefs -- traditionally connected the throne to local *wats* via the Buddhist hierarchy and village monks. Local *wats*, being the historical religious, social, educational, and political centres within villages, held significant authority in the day to day lives of rural farmers dependent on them for the creation and transmission of merit. Yet, the local *wat* was also a primary means by which young men could receive

formal instruction and foreign intrusion into this arena upset the normal rhythm of the countryside, albeit slowly compared to the capital. Even though colonialism brought change, it was the symbolic power in the form of knowledge that institutionalised monastic identity as the representation of moral authority which resonated with far-flung rural communities. Although educational reforms would continue, village monks and monasteries still commanded enough authority to remain key factors to be considered by those attempting to win over rural villagers.

This aspect of village monasteries would also prove to be their undoing. As centres of power within villages, they were singled out by the Khmer Rouge for destruction in order to remove the one true rival for their ultimate ascension to supremacy. Tragically, the monastery was specifically approached early on by the Khmer Rouge to gain legitimacy in the eyes of rural villagers. As the educated and trusted members of farming communities, local monks unwittingly helped spread the socialist ideology of the Communists. Once in power the latter would reveal their true agenda: the destruction of an order and institution that had for centuries been at the heart of village life.

Although the agenda of the Khmer Rouge would only become apparent later, young men continued to serve in the monastery and, for many, support the growing threat the Khmer Rouge posed to the Lon Nol government. The reasons why young men joined the monastery then and now are difficult to reconcile, particularly considering the context of Cambodia in the 1970s. Many undoubtedly joined for the reasons men always have: the creation of merit, family obligations, and the chance to receive an education and learn practical skills.

Today the reasons why young men choose to enter the monastery of course vary from individual to individual and these invariably will affect how they are viewed by the wider populace. Aside from the obvious increase in merit and educational aspects, there are also opportunities to establish social networks within and without the country and remove of oneself from the laborious task of rice farming. Although reconstruction of the monastery and *sangha* was slow, the relative power it retained throughout the countryside compared to other institutions reflects its ability to project a spiritual-political authority that influences the lives of many. Yet, this power is only as influential as those who embody the monastery's traditions and the beliefs it represents.

Monastic identity, therefore, is contingent upon a competent cadre of monks who embody Cambodian Buddhism and monastic traditions while also acting as a symbol of reciprocal exchange through merit-making and participation in annual festivals on the part of villagers. Identity is shaped through the superficial signs of the monastery -- wearing saffron robes and residing within a *wat* – as well as through an individual's commitment and religious competence. This in turn influences the perceptions local villagers have regarding monastic identity and the relevance of the monastery, monks, and ultimately Buddhism in their everyday lives compared to other beliefs which are employed in various settings and circumstances.

The Sacred, Profane, and wider State before, during, and after Democratic Kampuchea

The reconstruction of education within the wider secular community throughout the 1980s-90s also reflected the fact that so many within the new PRK political hierarchy were former members of the DK regime. Thus, a 'suitable history' was created resulting in many young Khmers being unaware of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Even now, modern textbooks lack a thorough description of the events of 1975-1979. Ironically, while the monastery was initially approached to further the cause of the future Communist regime, it has now become one of the few institutions where the evidence of the religion's destruction and genocide of the Khmer people in the form of human remains continues to be housed.

However, the newly emplaced PRK government was not the only institution to come under scrutiny. When the *sangha* was finally re-established, questions of legitimacy arose as to its place within the country. Even so, this reaching back to tradition was one means by which the PRK government could solidify its position within the country and on the international stage. This was tempered, however, by the need for young men to serve in the military. Even though temples were allowed to be rebuilt in the early 1980s, the number of men allowed to be ordained or re-ordained was kept to a minimum. The lack of young men being trained in the monastery and the annihilation by the Khmer Rouge of more senior monks meant that centuries of knowledge was lost. Yet, the monatery's reconstruction was to be done under the supervision of foreign and domestic political powers that were still battling an ongoing insurgency. This influence continues to be seen as political parties and their affiliates

exert their agenda on monastic identity and the tenor of the *sangha's* voice in urban areas and the wider countryside.

That voice, though, is only as relevant as its ability to represent the actual needs of those it is meant to serve as opposed to larger powers which often cloud a *wat's* character through disproportionate gifts in relation to what rural villages can afford. In a land where *wats* dot the countryside, and in some areas to such an extent that villagers can just as easily patronise several *wats* within walking distance, is being perceived as 'rich' or elitist a problem? To the extent that it affects a monk's ability to receive donations, possibly, but to the extent that it affects a village's economy, definitely. While numerous politicians and wealthy patrons would visit Chum Kriel on certain holidays, their donations did not necessarily benefit the wider community as they were often put back into the *wat* for repairs or new construction projects. However, this must not be seen in purely financial terms but also in terms of how it affected the sacredness of the *wat* and the identity it engendered for the resident monastic community. The ability of more wealthy patrons to put on elaborate festivals does not necessarily bar villagers from joining in the celebration but feelings of exclusiveness can engender feelings of disassociation with what would otherwise be a village's temple as opposed to one for those with deep pockets.

Being unable to conduct a festival such as *Katun* can create animosity, especially when the reason is that another, more wealthy (and non-local) patron has been allowed to put on the festival instead. However, in a *wat* such as Kompong Dtrou Lite, this animosity is not likely to exist as resident members of the *sangha* (i.e., local villagers) will nonetheless benefit from the material contributions donated during the festival.

Although local villagers are not owners of a *wat* per se, they are stakeholders (Good 2004:162) in that the activities within the temple have an impact on their day to day lives. The various festivals throughout the year can thus create harmony within some *wats* and disharmony within others. While the inclusion of other rituals within broader Buddhist ceremonies can restore this harmony such as those performed for *neak ta*, when a *neak ta* is held in little regard within a *wat* there can be a disruption in the customary social relationships and activities normally associated with village temples. Whether or not this is directly related to how a *neak ta* is viewed is open to debate. Nonetheless, the totality of relationships between a village, its temple, and local spirits corresponds to the relevance a *wat* has in the daily lives of villagers. An active monastery will have an active *sangha* and with it, a viable *neak ta*.

What we must also address, however, is the experience of Khmers throughout the country during the DK regime. Although researchers have tended to present the DK years in holistic terms, there were differences in the experiences of Khmers at the hands of the Khmer Rouge (Vickery 1984:28). Likewise, the idea that the Buddhist monastery was 'surprised' by the Communist onslaught also needs to be reconsidered given that the monastery was approached early on in an attempt by the Khmer Rouge to gain their trust in spreading their ideology. Further, we must also address the links between the monastery and the heavy-handed tactics by King (then Prince) Sihanouk prior to his overthrow in 1970. As the monastery became seen as connected with this old, repressive political order, disaffected peasants and unemployed young urbanites also began to see the monastery as privileged and elitist, living off the work of others. This was further compounded by the fact that those educating young urbanites were among the many

influenced by the Marxist ideology they studied abroad.

While the reconstruction of the monastery has affected the ways in which people worship and practice Buddhism, it has also affected the numerous roles local *wats* play. As educational, political, and social centres they define, to a large extent, how a village operates and is perceived by outsiders. Far from being an abstraction, local *wats* are often the centre of village life. While certain individuals may be less devoted to Buddhism than others and may rarely visit a *wat* for spiritual purposes, many still attend the numerous social functions contained in annual ceremonies performed throughout the year. Even so, all of the above roles have varied over time and space depending on the levels of sacredness and profanity found within temples and the larger belief system. By this I am referring to a *wat's* position over time within an area and the space that is created, through rituals, for individuals to step out of the normal profane time experienced in everyday life, and into the sacred time they enter into through those rituals. Even though some younger people in different rural parts of the country do not see religious rituals as important in their lives since the end of the conflict, many rituals continue to remain popular while others, such as those for *neak ta*, have actually increased in urban areas.

The Economics of Merit and the Role of Hindu and Folk Beliefs within Cambodian Buddhism

Nonetheless, we are again faced with the question of competency regarding monks and how temples are perceived by the surrounding villages they serve when addressing issues of Buddhism's reconstruction. Kompong Dtrou Lite was in many respects similar to other *wats* in that it was relatively poor in comparison to other larger *wats* such as Chum Kriel. However, it was this aspect of Kompong Dtrou Lite, that commonality and the interpersonal connections it fostered, that made it popular. Chum Kriel, on other hand, was atypical in that it was very large, administratively oriented, and received large donations from powerful and well-connected patrons. These aspects of the *wat* branded it 'rich' with its cadre of monks seen as elitist and out of touch with local villagers similar to those ideas noted above harboured by many prior to the fall of the Lon Nol regime in 1975.

The economics of merit guides many aspects of village economies in Theravada Buddhist nations as individuals and families engage in merit-making activities which in turn support the village *wat* and the monks therein -- most if not all of whom come from either the village or the surrounding area. Through these festivals individuals can expect to increase their chance for a better afterlife via merit-making activities as well as enjoy the social facets such as reconnecting with family members or matchmaking for their son or daughter. Yet, festivals are also important, vital in many respects, for agriculture as the annual cycle of festivals helps to determine when the planting and harvesting of rice crops will occur. The economy of merit, therefore, is built upon a foundation of reciprocal exchange whereby villagers trade material goods for the creation of merit vis-

à-vis monks and rituals while assuring successful harvests through annual festivals.

How merit-making activities relate to the dichotomy between the Great and Little traditions in many respects also reflects Cambodia's return to the world stage and political legitimacy. While the country certainly has had its share of troubles since the pullout of the Vietnamese in 1989 (including voter fraud, political violence, and a coup in 1997), those in power who increasingly patronised the religion after its re-establishment reflected the country's need for international aid and an end to religious intolerance. However, 'intolerance' needs to be qualified as limited to those actions which overtly target religious institutions and specialists of the Great traditions. The Little traditions, on the other hand, tend to escape intolerance -- even reportedly during the DK regime -- given their ubiquity and decentralised characteristics. Local spirits such as *neak ta*, lacking the hierarchy of the Great traditions, would not necessarily require official patronage in the country's quest for legitimacy. Although some shrines such as the one for *Kleung Meun* receive official acknowledgement, local spirits and their attendant rituals are by and large accepted as part of Khmer cosmology, at one time part of Buddhism, and at another distinct from it as represented by monks serving as delegates of the religion's expression to the outside world.

While *Kleung Meun's* shrine and others have historic connections reaching back to Cambodia's great kingdoms, other more recent monumental constructions such as the *Choeung Ek* memorial at the well known 'killing fields' have created a collective relationship between survivors of the holocaust and those lost. The relationships that develop are not necessarily connected to any one particular identity but to the collective identity of victims, both the deceased and those who survived. Memorials and shrines

such as these allow people to engage the remains of the deceased and create merit for those who met their end through an unnatural or violent manner. Even though numerous official and unofficial shrines dot the landscape, larger monumental structures also serve purposes outside of purely spiritual ones; their construction was also driven by wider political motivations justifying the Vietnamese invasion and the subsequent need for international aid. The former point is particularly significant given that this historic enemy of Cambodia occupied the country and installed a government which was battling an ongoing insurgency.

A larger question also remains regarding merit-making activities and reconstructed temples. That is, can a *wat* that was once used as a killing centre reclaim its religiosity when re-consecrated or will it never again be able to engage the sacred in the eyes of villagers? One could argue that although so many were used for unconscionable acts, this is offset by the fact that while *wats* are 'Buddhist' they are also places where the 'original' religion of Cambodia can be engaged. Even though the spirits of those who died under violent circumstances are feared, *neak ta*, the ubiquitous folk spirit that abounds throughout the country, can be placated through rituals performed at *wats*. Temples that were used as killing sites can, therefore, be viewed as logical vehicles, or sacred spaces, to appease the spirits of those murdered within their walls.

What also needs to be acknowledged is the very idea of the separation of beliefs: do villagers see Buddhism as but one element in a three-part system or do they view it as one ongoing field that has no divisions between those beliefs? Or, does it even matter? Further, does this field with varying beliefs encapsulated under the wider banner of

Buddhism with all of its trappings define aspects of Khmer identity as displayed via the Buddhist monk as representing all of those things Khmer cosmology embodies? Dividing Cambodian Buddhism (or Buddhist practice in general) into specific parts certainly is a convenient academic exercise but whether Khmers recognise these divisions is another matter.

From my research I have come to understand Cambodian Buddhism as being two things. In one sense it is that macro-religion, that broad sweeping Great tradition with all of the history, customs, beliefs, and ceremony that one associates with Buddhism. However, once one scratches the surface, another and more relevant sphere in the everyday life of Khmers is uncovered. Within this, one sees other facets of Khmer cosmology that reflect the everyday realities of rural subsistence farming and other elements of religious traditions that continue to hold sway throughout the country. Although throughout this work I have dealt with various aspects of Cambodian Buddhism, in reality it is difficult (perhaps futile) to try and encapsulate the religion -- or possibly any religion -- within a set of defined boundaries as what is considered part of an established religion varies from region to region. While the Khmer Rouge attempted to destroy Cambodian Buddhism through the destruction of those more obvious signs of the macro-religion, their attempts ultimately proved unsuccessful albeit considerably damaging.

What the reconstruction of Buddhism has shown, though, is that individuals are much more resilient in their beliefs, particularly when a religion's expression can take on numerous forms and traditions. Popular Buddhist expression further demonstrates through the economics of merit the political economy of the monastery and its ability to

promote the possibility for action among individuals and groups to gain greater political access. While the destruction of Buddhism under the DK regime negated this political economy for years, the reconstruction of the religion and rebuilding of temples allowed that type of economy to resurface. Consequently, the notoriety of certain temples and the number of people they could attract allowed certain *wats* to have greater influence with respect to others. In this study there are certain aspects of this at work with Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite and Chum Kriel which have contributed to both the political economy and social capital of the two.

The latter temple, although having political influence, did not muster the same support among the local populace. Although politicians made it a point to patronise Wat Chum Kriel, that very patronisation portrayed the temple as detached and out of touch with locals who were not part of its more hierarchical associations as opposed to Kompong Dtrou Lite's radiating, web-like association base. Political elites have patronised Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite in the past but the temple's limited exposure to this type of patronage allowed for it to maintain its rural status among locals who were actively involved in the *wat's* day to day operation. Further, it was dependent on donations from local villagers compared to Chum Kriel which received support from politicians and wealthy elites. Thus, while Kompong Dtrou Lite did not receive as much in terms of monetary investment, it still could galvanise support from a broader network of patrons, something Chum Kriel could not.

Even though the reconstruction of the monastery and *sangha* was indeed slow the relative power it retained throughout the countryside compared to other institutions reflects its ability to project a spiritual-political authority. Yet, this power is only as

influential as those who embody the monastery's traditions and the beliefs it represents. Monastic identity, therefore, is contingent upon a competent cadre of monks who embody Cambodian Buddhism and monastic traditions while also acting as a symbol of reciprocal exchange through merit-making and participation in annual festivals on the part of villagers. Although identity is shaped through some of the more superficial signs of the monastery (such as wearing saffron robes and residing within a *wat*), it is also formed through an individual's commitment and religious competence which can directly affect a community's opinion of a particular monastery or the religion in general.

Institutional 'Devarãja-ism': Royal Power and Expressions of Religious Authority

The expansion of secular political influence combined with the lessening of ties to a formally sacred centre could likely see the influence of a powerful religious apparatus outsourced to local practitioners filling gaps that a more robust and influential Great tradition would normally fill. Historically, as various beliefs within Khmer cosmology came and went -- often changing from king to king -- the solidification of one sole ideology would have been difficult to maintain. Lacking an established superstructure whose hierarchy ran a chain from the centre to outlying regions, local folk beliefs could continue to deal with issues that presented themselves regardless of the religious flavour of the royal court. More specifically, the Great traditions could maintain a role as a political vehicle and symbol of the court's influence while the practical method for resolving everyday needs continued to run through traditional

practices maintained throughout generations.

During his visit to Angkor in the thirteenth century, the Chinese emissary, Chou Ta-kuan, noted the Khmer myth upon which the kingdom depended for survival. The story told of the necessity for the king to make nightly sojourns to the top of a golden tower where he slept. Within this tower was believed to reside a spirit in the form of a serpent with nine heads who was the master of the soil. At night, it took the form of a woman with whom the king met for a nightly tryst. Only after this could he descend from the tower to sleep with his wives and concubines for only he could enter the tower. If the spirit failed to appear then the king would perish; if the king failed to meet with the spirit then disaster would befall the kingdom (Chou 1967 [1297]:12).

Attaching the crown to a dominant cosmology allowed Khmer kings to bring their empires under greater control by connecting rule to religious loyalties. This attachment was given form through ceremony and its attendant rituals and specialists who brought the cosmology of the court to within the popular cosmology of the rural populace. How this took place within the countries of South and Southeast Asia depended on their respective histories and the Hindu, Buddhist, and other popular traditions that shaped their disparate kingdoms. Although this courtly attachment was directed towards maintaining rule over the subjugated, the display of power and the ability to command labour and material also determined relations with other kingdoms. Engaging deities, both Great and Little, served as an instrument of state authority that allowed the rulers of Hindu/Buddhist kingdoms to display their connection to the supernatural via its associated cosmic endorsement.

Although it has been argued that the continuous damage to the soil contributed,

if not caused, the fall of Angkor (Mabbett and Chandler 1995:215), the accepted and *expected* royal engagement with the supernatural led the political powers to enter into a type of third party contract with the governed and the spirit-world the kingdom relied on. In legal terms, the latter acted as a 'disclosed principle'; the governed accepted royal authority on the condition that the king and the disclosed principle, the supernatural, met certain conditions. These were satisfied by the engagement in rites that were defined or interpreted by royal religious specialists. If the king failed to engage in these rites this would result in the spirit-world withdrawing from its obligation to ensure adequate harvests, rainfall, etc., to the detriment of the governed resulting in the king's loss of power (both secular and divine). However, if the governed rebelled and refused to acquiesce to the demands of the king they may risk poor harvests and rainfall due to the loss of status of the monarch and the trappings of state power (this is assuming that the king would lose such power due to the loss of revenue from taxation and/or conscription).

The position of monks as local intelligentsia further cemented the role of tradition as a means of validating practices and social arrangements (Rhum 1996:350) that provided structure within a community as well as an established spiritual hierarchy with incumbent reciprocal relationships (Chandler 1991 [1984]:272). Cambodia reflected other Southeast Asian nations as one characterised by the notion of plurality. That is, a region run in a flexible non-bureaucratic style by a demonstrative ruler who focused on management and ceremony (Shamsul 2003). While the concept of 'state' as defined by subsequent European powers was not necessarily present, the ability to hold separate regions together under the banner of 'kingdom' relied on ceremony managed on

the local level by *wats* to maintain control of the political-religious cosmology the king and court embodied.

This intricate dance in which the various parties participated demonstrated the prerequisite for a political-religiosity of the royal court to ensure its own survival vis-à-vis the continued success of harvests, rainfall, and other factors. The need to control this political-religiosity was placed in the hands of religious specialists who were the sole arbiters in determining or interpreting the rites required to sustain the relationship between the king and broader cosmology. This trickled down to the village level through the symbol of the *wat* and resident monks who were the rural representatives of that great chain of spirituality connecting deities, king, and subject to the soil. It would be in the interest of a ruler to have an adequate command of specialists who could sufficiently represent him but who also deserved deference from the wider populace, yet remained firmly under his control to perpetuate this model without them becoming agents of discontent who could possibly pose a challenge to his rule.

Reintegration and Power

Khmer politics has historically maintained a fluid relationship with the local *wat* and current trends reflect this. The level of separation that exists between the government and the *wat* has been carefully broached through the re-establishment of historical patron-client relationships. These relationships have (as before) paved the way for greater political involvement and allowed the government to keep its voice throughout a countryside where the vast majority of people are still employed in the same manner that has existed for hundreds of years. Although mechanisation, travel, and seasonal urban employment have transformed the once 'island village' to be included within the broader society, local villages are still, by in large, distinct in terms of broader involvement within the larger political system based primarily in the capital.

Alongside this comes the cultivated image of the government as liberator of the country and rebuilder of the monastery. In many ways this image is reminiscent of past rulers. The institutionalisation of such efforts reflects the traditional relationship between governments and Buddhism as well as the development of a type of '*devarãja-ism*'. More specifically, the concept of a powerful patron connected to the *sangha* and the county. This is a derivation of the triad "King, Sangha, Nation", or "*Sdic, Sangha, Srok"* -- the virtuous ruler who acts as the protector of Buddhism, and the *sangha* that legitimises their position as ruler while caring for the needs of the country.

With the reintegration of more than 370,000 refugees in the years following the DK regime and the wide disparities within the economy, education, and urban-rural infrastructure (Doyle 1998) the local *wat* was in a position of influence to the extent that it could re-establish traditional claims to power within the countryside. The overt

influence the government continues to have on the monastery needs to be seen in this light. Although it would not be easy to describe a 'common' attitude towards political involvement within local monasteries in Kampot, it was often noted that the government under the CPP was the most generous in the region towards *wats* compared to other (and less solvent) parties. This is not lost on many monks, though, as they described the popularity of the CPP among local villagers due to such generosity but went on to note the good reputation the Sam Rainsy Party enjoys with members of the monastery because of their anti-corruption stance.

As the school texts described in chapter two show, recent history in the country is often washed over without giving details of those involved or the degree of their involvement in the DK regime. While volunteering as an English teacher in various schools, both monastic and secular, I often observed how students would not only be mistaken about the realities of the war years but were instead presented with alternative views of history. The Khmer Rouge are discussed little if at all while the prime minister and other's involvement in the removal of the Khmer Rouge was portrayed in heroic terms with little if any discussion of their involvement in the regime itself.

This re-writing of history has also had a deleterious effect on the younger generation's understanding of exactly who the Khmer Rouge were. As Tai, 24, from Kep village put it when describing the members of the Communist regime, "Why would Khmers kill Khmers?" He went on to cite, "Pol Pot was a good man but then he did such bad things," proposing that people (i.e., foreign powers, specifically Vietnam and China) stepped in and caused all the killings which were later attributed to the Khmer Rouge. Although young, he had still been raised listening to the stories of older survivors yet

still found it difficult to believe that Khmers were capable of such actions. Along with other younger Khmers I spoke with in the area, Tai accepted the government's account of the period and was more sympathetic to the notion that the Khmer Rouge were an invention of outside forces.

This attitude was not reserved for only those in the countryside. During the New Year a monk visiting Wat Kompong Dtrou Lite from Phnom Penh voiced similar feelings. Nyet was 23, a monk for seven years, well educated, and attended university in the capital but had also lost five brothers and sisters to the Khmer Rouge. He blamed "foreigners" (Chinese and Vietnamese) for bringing in a harmful ideology to convince Khmers to kill their fellow Khmers. Interestingly enough, he acknowledged that the West probably knew of the events but in his words "Couldn't do anything about it," referring to the pullout of the US and other Western powers in the region following the conflict in Vietnam. By no means did the Khmer Rouge have a good reputation but the fact that many younger Khmers were quick to blame their Chinese and Vietnamese neighbours may be indicative of the extent to which much of Cambodia's recent history has been glossed over in favour of old nemeses.

Nyet's assessment was often recounted by many young Khmers. Often I would hear descriptions of the DK regime as a foreign endeavour and how Khmers -- if they took part at all -- were somehow brainwashed into committing horrific acts. This has been cited by other authors of Khmers and their perception of the Khmer Rouge. Bit (1991) notes that many urban Khmers were (and are) so removed from the countryside and believed the propaganda put out by the former Sihanouk and Lon Nol governments that they were completely overwhelmed when the Khmer Rouge entered the capital in

1975. Descriptions of them as “wild” or not resembling Khmers still can be heard by many who simply find it too difficult to believe that somehow their own countrymen could resort to such despicable acts against their own people (ibid).

Even though most Khmers acknowledge that corruption is one of the main roadblocks to their country’s development, the notion of power, its ramifications, and means by which it is attained fall under what I refer to as the ‘Khmer Conundrum’. Those who acquire power through dubious acts and wield it with equal contempt are, on the one hand, believed to suffer in the next life but, on the other, are also seen as deserving of their position due to the merit gained in their former existence which allowed for the acquisition of power in the first place. An individual’s power is often seen, therefore, as legitimate by the mere fact that it is held. This seemingly inescapable dilemma in many ways contributes to the laissez-faire attitude many Khmers have towards the actions of others. Whether this is out of fear of retribution, the influence of Theravada Buddhism, or a general sense of minding one’s own business is debatable. However, one must question whether this has contributed to the delay of the Khmer Rouge trials and the extent to which many Khmers express confidence in there outcome.

Indeed, politics in general is often viewed as something simply out of the hands of the average Khmer’s everyday existence. King Sihamoni’s ascension to the throne which occurred during my fieldwork was of little importance to the monks of Wat Chum Kriel and Kompong Dtrou Lite or to local villagers nearby. Tradition aside, the king’s place within the country is not as important as others who have a direct impact on the everyday problems facing the country. That said, many also related the positive effect the king has, particularly when visiting the countryside. While still important in terms of

tradition, his ability to influence politics was not lost on locals, however, this was more in reference to King Sihanouk than King Sihamoni.

Perhaps this somewhat relegated position is understandable given the plight the country has endured. Not surprisingly, everyday concerns trump other, non-pressing matters when poverty and the potential for food shortages are constant threats. Although past monarchs were able to maintain a connection with the countryside, the current government's efforts at investing money as well as ideology within the monastery have created a new type of hierarchy. This new institutional '*devarãja-ism*' does not appear to be defined by a deified status but as a mythologized liberator and creator of the new Cambodian state. Solidifying a power base via the most important local power institution -- the local *wat* -- has helped to maintain authority while appealing to traditional patron-client relationships and the accepted/expected duties they engender.

The Future of the Cambodian Buddhist Monastery

The re-establishment of the *wat* as a social centre post-1979 and its increased appearance in public circles has come at the cost of political influence that has resulted in measures being established to prevent the monastery from truly becoming a strong social critic. Although the monastery has succeeded in regaining some of its former status, it is still the target of political suppression when falling outside of the current government's agenda. While older generations often complained that Buddhism has not returned to its pre-war status or that younger generations are not as religious-minded as before, younger generations often expressed the belief that Buddhism was still important for the kingdom. Even so, they did acknowledge other issues such as the role of

economics and education as motivating factors for those choosing to enter the monastery. The local *wat* is definitely a vehicle for some young men to earn an education or to alleviate economic pressures on their families. However, this has historical precedent for Cambodia and other Theravada Buddhist nations and should not necessarily be too surprising in a country that is still very conservative in comparison to many of its neighbours.

Merit-making activities at local *wats* and the various Buddhist and folk beliefs practiced therein also permit the 'merit-economy' to regulate the distribution of goods and services between local villagers and monks. Without this regulatory function monks might otherwise be unable to live within their community due to financial pressures. Within urban areas, an increase in college graduates in the face of a troubled economy dependent on agriculture, tourism, and textile exportation could possibly bring about similar disaffection by university students seen in the 1960s and 1970s particularly if those latter two pillars of the economy suffer. The loss of preferential quotas for the garment industry or a decrease in tourism due to transnational issues such as the spread of avian flu make potential unrest a real possibility. With the unlikelihood of many educated young adults moving to the countryside to work in the third economic pillar of agriculture (if, of course, they or their families own land) the 'silent partner' of the Cambodian economy, the Buddhist monastery, may become a more viable option for otherwise unemployed young men. However, this will only affect half of the population given that women are barred from entering the monkhood. The potential for an increase in other social problems such as a rise in prostitution, drug addiction, and crime in the face of a shrinking textile industry raises further, potentially detrimental issues.

Even without the possible loss to the economy and increase in joblessness, I believe that the local *wat* will retain its status if not increase in status if it is able to preserve a degree of separation from political powers that have a large say on monastic issues via monetary influence. An increase in suppressing local and/or influential monks who are more outspoken than other segments of the population would more than likely affect the foreign aid on which the country relies so heavily. Large donations by the ruling party and ties to the monastic hierarchy can inhibit overt criticism but if faced with the loss of foreign aid the government may tolerate (as it does currently) some criticism if only to a degree. However, this could put the monastery in a quandary; accepting government aid invites censorship but given the poverty within the countryside and the place of the *wat* as a social and religious centre, such aid would probably not be declined. Indeed, declining such aid may harm locals who rely on the *wat* for various secular needs. Accepting it, however, can also bring about local scorn as seen with Wat Chum Kriel and a decrease in status for monks within similar 'rich' *wats*.

The future of the monastery will depend on maintaining a balance between these competing local and national interests yet retaining a status as a viable voice for social change or critic of government corruption. The local *wat* has been altered in terms of the transfer of tradition and the physical geography where the sacred and profane meet and segregate but the ability they have as conduits for merit-making activities still remains viable in the eyes of many. This power and viability in the face of other competing and complementing traditions such as Hindu and folk beliefs, is actualised via the Buddhist clergy who embody Khmer cosmology in everyday practice.

Even so, although the clergy's identity as religious specialists has regained some

of its former status, the extent to which it has been allowed or tolerated to flourish by political entities as well as rural farmers must also be measured against extenuating factors. These include the access to information, competency of monks (i.e., monastic training), and the importance of Buddhism for generations raised during and after the DK regime. These factors and others will further shape the relevance of the monastery as Cambodia continues its civil, economic, and social restoration. As the events of 1975-1979 are finally being addressed through international tribunals, what they will mean for the future of Cambodian Buddhism remains to be seen.

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